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SERMONS PREACHED IN MANCHESTER by

Alexander Maclaren D.D.

First Series

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THE STONE OF STUMBLING.

ST. MATTHEW xxi. 44.

Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

AS Christ's ministry drew to its close, its severity and its gentleness both increased; its severity to the class to whom it was always severe, and its gentleness to the class from whom it never turned away. Side by side, through all His manifestation of Himself, there were the two aspects:—"He showed Himself *froward*" (if I may quote the word) to the self-righteous and the Pharisee; and he bent with more than a woman's tenderness of yearning love over the darkness and sinfulness, which in its great darkness dimly knew itself blind, and in its sinfulness stretched out a lame hand of faith, and groped after a divine deliverer. Here, in my text, there are only words of severity and awful foreboding. Christ has been telling those Pharisees and priests that the kingdom is to be taken from them, and given to a nation that brings forth the fruits thereof. He interprets for them an Old Testament figure, often

recurring, which we read in the 118th Psalm; (and I may just say, in passing, that we get here His interpretation of that psalm, and the vindication of our application of it, and other similar ones, to Him and His office) "The stone which the builders rejected," said He, "is become the head of the corner;" and then, falling back on other Old Testament uses of the same figure, He weaves into one the whole of them—that in Isaiah about the "sure foundation," and that in Daniel about "the stone cut out without hands, which became a great mountain," crushing down all opposition,—and centres them all in Himself; as fulfilled in Himself, in His person and His work.

The two clauses of my text figuratively point to two different classes of operation on the rejectors of the Gospel. What are these two classes? "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." In the one case, the stone is represented as passive, lying quiet; in the other, it has got motion. In the one case, the man stumbles and hurts himself; a remediable injury, a self-inflicted injury, a natural injury, without the active operation of Christ to produce it at all; in the other case the injury is worse than remediable, it is utter, absolute, grinding destruction, and it comes from the active operation of the "stone of stumbling." That is to say, the one class represents the present hurts and harms which, by the natural operation of the thing, without the action of Christ judicially at all, every man receives in the very act of rejecting the Gospel; and the other represents the ultimate issue of that rejection,

which rejection is darkened into opposition and fixed hostility, when the stone that was laid "for a foundation" has got wings (if I may so say), and comes down in judgment, crushing and destroying the antagonist utterly. "Whosoever falls on this stone is broken," here and now; and "on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder," hereafter and yonder!

Taking, then, into account the weaving together in this passage of the three figures from the Old Testament to which I have already referred,—the rejected stone, the foundation, and the mountain-stone of Daniel, and looking in the light of these, at the twofold issues, one present and one future, which the text distinctly brings before us,—we have just three points to which I ask your attention now. *First*, Every man has some kind of contact with Christ. *Secondly*, Rejection of Him, here and now, is harm and maiming. And, *lastly*, Rejection of Him, hereafter and yonder, is hopeless, endless, utter destruction.

In the first place, EVERY MAN HAS SOME KIND OF CONNEXION WITH CHRIST. I am not going to enter at all now upon any question about the condition of the "dark places of the earth" where the Gospel has not come as a well-known preached message; we have nothing to do with that: the principles on which *they* are judged is not the question before us now. I am speaking exclusively about persons who have heard the word of salvation, and are dwelling in the midst of what we call a Christian land. Christ is offered to each of us, in good faith on God's part, as a means of salvation, a foundation on which we may build. A man is free to

accept or to reject that offer. If he reject it, he has not thereby cut himself off from all contact and connexion with that rejected Saviour, but he still sustains a relation to Him; and the message that he has refused to believe, is exercising an influence upon his character and his destiny.

Christ comes, I say, offered to us all in good faith on the part of God, as a foundation upon which we may build. And then comes in that strange mystery, that a man, consciously free, turns away from the offered mercy, and makes Him that was intended to be the basis of his life, the foundation of his hope, the rock on which, steadfast and serene, he should build up a temple-home for his soul to dwell in,—makes Him a stumbling-stone against which, by rejection and unbelief, he breaks himself!

My friend, will you let me lay this one thing upon your heart,—you cannot hinder the Gospel from influencing you somehow. Taking it in its lowest aspects, the Gospel is one of the forces of modern society, an element in our present civilization. It is everywhere, it obtrudes itself on you at every turn, the air is saturated with its influence. To be unaffected by such an all-pervading phenomenon is impossible. To no individual member of the great whole of a nation is it given to isolate himself utterly from the community. Whether he oppose or whether he acquiesce in common opinions, to denude himself of the possessions which belong in common to his age and state of society is in either case impracticable. "That which cometh into your mind," said one of the prophets to the Jews who were trying to

cut themselves loose from their national faith and their ancestral prerogatives, "That which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, We will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries to serve wood and stone." Vain dream! You can no more say, I will pass the Gospel by, and it shall be nothing to me, I will simply let it alone, than you can say, I will shut myself up from other influences proper to my time and nation. You cannot go back to the old naked barbarism, and you cannot reduce the influence of Christianity, even considered merely as one of the characteristics of the times, to a zero. You may fancy you are letting it alone, but it does not let you alone; it is here, and you cannot shut yourself off from it.

But it is not merely as a subtle and diffused influence that the Gospel exercises a permanent effect upon us. It is presented to each of us here individually, in the definite form of an actual offer of salvation for each, and of an actual demand of trust from each. The words pass into our souls, and thenceforward, it can never be the same as if they had not been there. The smallest particle of light falling on the sensitive plate produces a chemical change that can never be undone again, and the light of Christ's love once brought to the knowledge and presented for the acceptance of a soul, stamps on it an ineffaceable sign of its having been there. The Gospel once heard, is always the Gospel which has been heard. Nothing can alter that. Once heard, it is henceforward a perpetual element in the whole condition, character, and destiny of the hearer.

Christ does something to every one of us. His

Gospel will tell upon you, it *is* telling upon you. If you disbelieve it, it is not the same as if you had never heard it. Never is the box of ointment opened without some savour from it abiding in every nostril to which its odour is wafted. Only the alternative, the awful "either, or," is open for each—the "savour of life unto life, *or* the savour of death unto death." To come back to the illustration of the text, Christ is something, and does something to every one of us. He is either the rock on which I build, poor, weak, sinful creature as I am, getting security, and sanctity and strength from Him, I being a living stone, built upon "the living stone," and partaking of the vitality of the foundation; or else He is the other thing, "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to them which stumble at the word." Christ stands for ever in some kind of relation to, and exercises for ever some kind of influence on, every man that has heard the Gospel.

And now, secondly, THE IMMEDIATE ISSUE OF REJECTION OF HIM IS LOSS AND MAIMING. "Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken." Just think for a moment, by way of illustrating this principle, first of all, of the *positive* harm which you do yourself in the act of turning away from the mercy offered you in Christ: and then think for a moment of the *negative* loss which you sustain by the same act.

The *positive* harm. Am I uncharitable when I say that no man ever yet *passively neglected* the message of love in God's Son: but that always *this* is the rude outline of the experience of people that know what it is to have a Saviour offered to them, and know what it is to put Him

away,—that there is a movement feeble and transitory of heart and will; that Conscience says, "Thou oughtest;" that Will says, "I would;" that the heart is touched by some sense of that great and gentle vision of light and love which passes before the eye; that the man, as it were, like some fever-ridden patient, lifts himself up for an instant from the bed on which he is lying, and puts out a hand, and then falls back again, the vacillating, fevered, paralysed will recoiling from the resolution; and the conscience having power to say, "Thou oughtest," but no power to enforce the execution of its decrees; and the heart turning away from the salvation that it would have found in the love of love, to the loss that it finds in the love of self and earth? Or in other words, is it not true that every man that rejects Christ does in simple verity *reject* Him, and not merely neglect Him; that there is always an effort, that there is a struggle, feeble perhaps, but real, which ends in the turning away? It is not that you stand there, and simply let Him go past. That were bad enough; but it is more than that. It is that you turn your back upon Him! It is not that His hand is laid on yours, and yours remains dead and cold, and does not open to clasp it; but it is that His hand being laid on yours, you clench yours the tighter, and *will not* have it. And so every man (I believe) that ever rejects Christ does these things thereby—wounds his own conscience, hardens his own heart, makes himself a worse man, just because he has had a glimpse, and has willingly, and almost consciously, "loved darkness rather than light." Oh, brethren, the message of love can never come into a human soul, and pass away

from it unreceived, without leaving that spirit worse, with all its lowest characteristics strengthened, and all its best ones depressed, by the fact of rejection. I have nothing to do now with pursuing that process to its end; but the natural result—if there were no judgment at all, if there were no movement ever given to the stone that you are to build on—the natural result of the simple rejection of the Gospel is that, bit by bit, all the lingering remains of nobleness that hover about the man, like scent about a broken vase, shall pass away; and that, step by step, through the simple process of saying, "I will not have Christ to rule over me," the whole being shall degenerate, until manhood becomes devilhood, and the soul is lost by its own want of faith. Unbelief is its own judgment; unbelief is its own condemnation; unbelief, as sin, is punished, like all other sins, by the perpetuation of deeper and darker forms of itself. Every time that you stifle a conviction, fight down a conviction, or din away a conviction; and every time that you feebly move towards the decision, "I *will* trust Him, and love Him, and be His," yet fail to realize it, you have harmed your soul, you have made yourself a worse man, you have lowered the tone of your conscience, you have enfeebled your will, you have made your heart harder against love, you have drawn another horny scale over the eye, that will prevent you from seeing the light that is yonder; you have, as much as in you is, withdrawn from God, and approximated to the other pole of the universe (if I may say that), to the dark and deadly antagonist of mercy, and goodness, and truth, and grace. "Whosoever falls on this stone," by the natural result of his unbelief,

"shall be broken" and maimed, and shall mar his own nature.

I need not dwell on the *negative* evil results of unbelief; the loss of that which is the only guide for a man, the taking away, or rather the failing to possess, that great love above us, that Divine Spirit in us, by which only we are ever made what we ought to be. This only I would leave with you, in this part of my subject, Whoever is not in Christ is maimed. Only he that is "a man in Christ" has come "to the measure of the stature of a perfect man." There, and there alone, do we get the power which will make us full-grown. There alone does the soul get hold of that good soil in which, growing, it becomes as a rounded, perfect tree, with leaves and fruits in their season. All other men are half-men, quarter-men, fragments of men, parts of humanity exaggerated, and contorted, and distorted from the reconciling whole which the Christian ought to be, and in proportion to his Christianity is on the road to be, and one day will assuredly and actually be, a "complete and entire man, wanting nothing;" nothing maimed, nothing broken, the realization of the ideal of humanity, the renewed copy "of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven!"

There is another consideration closely connected with this second part of my subject, that I will just mention, and pass on. Not only that by the act of rejection of Christ do we harm and maim ourselves, but also that all attempts at opposition—formal opposition—to the Gospel as a system, stand self-convicted and self-condemned to speedy decay. What a commentary upon

that word, "Whosoever falls on this stone shall be broken," is the whole history of the heresies of the Church and the assaults of unbelief! Man after man, rich in gifts, endowed often with far larger and nobler faculties than the people that oppose him, with indomitable perseverance, a martyr to his error, sets himself up against the truth that is sphered in Jesus Christ; and the great Divine message simply goes on its way, and all the babblement and noise is like so many bats flying against a light, or the wild sea-birds that come sweeping up in the tempest and the night, against the hospitable Pharos that is upon the rock, and smite themselves dead against it. Sceptics well-known in their generation, who made people's hearts tremble for the ark of God, what has become of them? Their books lie dusty and undisturbed on the top shelf of libraries; whilst there the Bible stands, with all the scribblings wiped off the page, as though they had never been! Opponents fire their small shot against the great Rock of ages, and the little pellets fall flattened, and only scale off a bit of the moss that has gathered there! My brother, let the history of the past, with other deeper thoughts, teach you and me a very calm and triumphant confidence about all that people say now-a-days; for all the modern opposition to this Gospel will go as all the past has done, and the newest systems which cut and carve at Christianity, will go to the tomb where all the rest have gone; and dead old infidelities will rise up from their thrones, and say to the bran-new ones of this generation, when their day is worked out, "Ah, are ye also become weak as we? art thou also become like one of us?" "Whosoever shall

fall on this stone shall be broken:" personally, he will be harmed; and his opinions, and his books, and his talk, and all his argumentation, will come to nothing, like the waves that break into impotent foam against the rocky cliffs.

Last of all, THE ISSUE, THE ULTIMATE ISSUE, OF UNBELIEF IS IRREMEDIABLE DESTRUCTION WHEN CHRIST BEGINS TO MOVE. The former clause has spoken about the passive operation of unbelief whilst the Gospel is being preached; the latter clause speaks about the active agency of Christ when the end shall have come, and the preaching of the Gospel shall have merged into the act of judgment. I do not want to dwell, brethren, upon that thought: it seems to me far too awful a one to be handled by my hands, at any rate. Let us leave it in the vagueness and dreadfulness of the words of Him that never spake exaggerated words, and who, when He said, "It shall grind him to powder," meant (as it seems to me) nothing less than a destruction which contrasted with the former remediable wounding and breaking, was a destruction utter, and hopeless, and everlasting, and without remedy. Ground—ground to powder! Any life left in that? any gathering up of that, and making a man of it again? All the humanity battered out of it, and the life clean gone from it! Does not that sound very much like everlasting destruction "from the presence of God and from the glory of His power?" Christ, silent now, will begin to speak; passive now, will begin to act. The stone comes down, and the fall of it will be awful! I remember, away up in a lonely Highland valley, where beneath a tall black cliff, all weather-

worn, and cracked, and seamed, there lies at the foot, resting on the greensward that creeps round its base, a huge rock, that has fallen from the face of the precipice. A shepherd was passing beneath it; and suddenly, when the finger of God's will touched it, and rent it from its ancient bed in the everlasting rock, it came down, leaping and bounding from pinnacle to pinnacle—and it fell; and the man that was beneath it is there now! "Ground to powder." Ah, my brethren, that is not *my* illustration —that is Christ's. Therefore I say to *you*, since all that stand against Him shall become "as the chaff of the summer threshing-floor," and be swept utterly away, make Him the foundation on which you build; and when the storm sweeps away every "refuge of lies," you will be safe and serene, builded upon the Rock of ages.

THE LORD'S SUPPER THE SAMPLE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

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1 Corinthians xi. 24.

This do in remembrance of Me.

Colossians iii. 17.

Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

ONE of the saddest things about the Christian life is, that it seems to ourselves to be split up into two separate parts, which we find it very hard, if not altogether impossible, to unite. We feel as if we lived in two different worlds. We have our moments of devotion, and our hours of utter worldliness. We begin, for instance, the day with thankful acknowledgment to God for His mercies; and howsoever sincere that may be, we know too well that it is going to be followed by a day of unthankful reception of them. We kneel down in the morning, and ask God to guide us; and then we go out into the world, and take guidance of idleness, and vanity, and selfishness. We confess our sins, and ask forgiveness; and then we rise from our knees, and

take our fellow-servant by the throat, and say, "Pay me that thou owest!" In a word, on the clear mountain-top we stand in the light of God's face, and then we come down into the plain, and the earthly vapours shut out the blue. I suppose the best of us feel this apparently inevitable severing of our lives into two unlike portions.

Is that distinction, then, between sacred and profane, a valid one? is there any reason why a man's prayers should be more devout than his business? is there any need why the sanctity of life should be curdled together, as it were, into Sundays and acts of special worship, and not be diffused through the whole of life? Look at these two passages; one of them taken out of the words for the institution of the holiest act of Christ's church, "This do in remembrance of Me;" the other of them taken out of a series of plain, simple practical directions to people, to do their work rightly in ordinary life: and yet the two commands are precisely the same. "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus," is exactly the same thing as saying, "This do in remembrance of Me." And surely it is a very beautiful and very significant fact, that thus the very same consecration is claimed for the most trivial acts of daily life, a hundred times repeated, as is claimed for that sacred communion of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. I need not dwell here, in passing, upon the complete refutation of all notions of an awful and separated sacredness as attaching to the act of the commemoration of our Lord's death, which such a parallel, as is evidently in the Apostle's mind here, gives.

I pass that altogether. My purpose now is only to try to set before you, in a few thoughts, the relation which the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, as the commemoration of the death of Christ, bears to the common acts of our common life. It is just this. The Communion of the Lord's Supper is meant to be a *sample of, and not an exception to, our common days: and in the rite there lies a mighty power to make the whole of the rest of life like itself.* These are the two points I wish to present to you this morning: the former of them is the one on which I want to dwell at the greatest length — the parallel betwixt the daily life of a Christian man, and this sacred act of communion at the table of our Lord.

In the first place, I would notice that ALL THE OBJECTS AROUND US ARE TO BE REGARDED BY US AS BEING SYMBOLS AND MEMORIALS OF OUR LORD. Bread and wine are very common things: the act of eating and drinking is not a very elevated one; a supper-table is by no means a very holy place. And when Christ selected such a place, such a time, such an act, such common materials, as being the fitting embodiments of the grandest and most precious truths of His Gospel, in addition to all the other things that He did by such a selection He did this furthermore—He showed us that all material things as well as that bread and wine which He chose for the special purpose, were fitted and were intended to impart the same symbolic and memorial teaching which these two are specially selected to do. The bread and the wine have an adaptation to speak to us about Christ's flesh and Christ's blood, about Christ's sacrifice, about eating and drinking it as the sustenance

of our spirits; but they are not more adapted,—or at least not in a different way, though in a different degree,—than the rest of the common objects that lie round about us.

I need not at all seek to enter on the reasons upon which the statement rests, that all created things are to be the symbols and memorials of our Lord. There is *one* mind in the universe, *one* Spirit working through all things; and all creatures, on their various platforms and in their different degrees, receive the impression of the same will, and are set to testify of the same Lord. The unity of the Maker, the all-pervading influence of one Divine Spirit, make everything sacred, and make the whole world a series of manifold meanings, and put every object to witness to some Divine truth. The whole universe stands here not only to say to us, "Look, there are works of design, there must be a designer; there are certain qualities which you may infer as existing in the Maker of all these things;" but to say to us, "Look, there, in these creatures, is a mirror in which you may see—not only capable of being inferred, but shadowed and typified—the Divine Spirit that made them, the laws of His being, and the revelation of Himself." All things that *are*, are the shadow and image of heavenly things. The highest lesson they can teach is, to remind us of and to symbolize for us the uncreated and everlasting Wisdom and Love and Beauty which lie beneath them, and ripple up through them.

But I need not dwell on this. The language of every nation under heaven has confessed it. The teaching of all the wise has embodied it. The natural impulse of us

all is to find shadows and symbols of spiritual life in natural existence. He who spake as never man spake, spake in parables, and, knowing all things, took bread and said, "This is my body." Surely, besides all the other purposes of that institution there is this also to teach us to see everywhere emblems of Him. Every day we walk amidst the "outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace," and in that meaning of the word sacrament, the true and Christian view of this wonderful world is that it is all one great sacrament. All the *elements* stand as types of spiritual things. The sunshine is to speak to us of the "light of the world," the life of men. The wind blows, an emblem of that Spirit, which, though He comes low and soft as befits a "Comforter," can rise and wax into a tempest against all "the lofty and lifted up." The water speaks of the stream of life and the drink for thirsty souls; and the fire of His purity and of His wrath. All *objects* are consecrated to Him. The trees of the field, in a thousand places, speak of the "root of David," and the vine of which we are all branches. The everlasting mountains are His "righteousness," the mighty deep His "judgments." All the *processes* of nature have been laid hold of by Him. The gentle dew falls a promise, and the lashing rain forebodes another storm, when many a sand-built house shall be swept away. Every spring is a prophecy of the resurrection of the dead, every harvest a promise of the coming of His kingdom and the blessed issues of all service for Him. All *living things*, in like manner, testify of Him. In that sense, as in others, He is lord over the fish of the sea, and over the fowls of the air, and over the beasts

of the field. The "eagle stirring up its nest," the "hen gathering her chickens under her wings," speak of Him, His functions and His relations to us. The "Lion of the tribe of Judah," and the "Lamb of God," were His names. All *occupations* of men, in like manner, are consecrated to reveal Him. He laid His hand upon the sower and the vine-dresser, upon the ploughman and the shepherd, upon the merchant and the warrior, upon the king and the prophet, and the judge, upon the teacher and the lawgiver, as being emblems of Himself. All *relations* between men testify of Him. Father and mother, brother and friend, husband, parent and children, they are all consecrated for this purpose. In a word, every act of our life sets forth some aspect of our Lord and of our relation to Him, from the moment when we open our eyes in the morning,—as those do who, having slept the sleep of sin, awake unto righteousness, all through the busy day, when our work may speak to us of His that worketh continually, and our rest may prophesy to us of the "rest that remaineth for the people of God;" and our journeyings may tell of the journey of the soul to God, and our home may testify of the home which is above the skies,—up to the hour when night falls, and sleep, the image of Death, speaks to us of the last solemn moment, when we shall close the eyes of our body on earth, to open those of our soul on the realities of eternity; when we shall no more "see through a glass darkly, but face to face." All things, and all acts, and this whole wonderful universe, proclaim to us the Lord our Father, Christ our love, Christ our hope, our portion, and our joy! Oh, brethren, if you would know the

meaning of the world, read Christ in it. If you would see the beauty of earth, take it for a prophet of something higher than itself. If you would pierce beneath the surface and know the sanctities that are all about us; remember that when He took bread and wine for a memorial of Him, He did not profane thereby, but consecrated thereby, all that He left out, and asserted the same power and the same prerogative, in lower degree, but as really and truly, for everything which the loving eye should look upon, for everything which the believing heart should apprehend. All is sacred. The world is the temple of God. Everywhere there are symbols and memorials of the living God!

Once more: not only are all objects around us regarded as being memorials of Him, but EVERY ACT OF OUR LIFE IS TO BE DONE FROM THE SAME MOTIVE AS THAT HOLY COMMUNION. "This do in remembrance of Me," or, as Paul expresses it, "discerning the Lord's body." Do this, not only *because you are in danger of forgetting*, but do this *because you remember*. Do this, not only in order that your reminiscences may be strengthened, but do it because they *are* strong. Seeing the Lord's body, discerning His presence, loving that which you discern—do this! And, in like manner, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Do all, that is to say, for the sake of the character, as revealed to you, of Him whom you love; do it all, giving thanks unto God and the Father by Him. And then, in the parallel passage at the close of the same chapter, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily," that is one principle; and next, as the foundation of all real heartiness, do it "as

to the Lord." This is the foundation, and the limitation as well; for it is only when we do it "heartily, as to the Lord," that earnestness is kept from degenerating into absorption, and that a man, whilst working with all his might, and "diligent in business," shall also be "fervent in spirit." The motive is the same; in the Communion it is the remembrance of the Lord, in the ordinary life it is "in the name of the Lord Jesus." Brethren, is that sacred motive one which you and I keep for select occasions, and for what we call special acts of worship? I am afraid that the most of Christian people do with that Divine reason for work, "the love of Christ constraineth me," as the old Franks (to use a strange illustration) used to do with their long-haired kings—they keep them in the palace at all ordinary times, give them no power over the government of the kingdom, only now and then bring them out to grace a procession, and then take them back again into their reverential impotence. That is very like what Christian people do, to a very large extent, with that which ought to be the rule of all their life, and the motive of all their work. We sit down to that communion, and we do *it* "in the name of the Lord Jesus;" we commemorate Him there. When we come to pray, we speak to Him and in His name. Our high tides of devotion do not come so often as the tides of the sea, and then for the rest of our time there is the long stretch of foul, oozy, barren beach when the waters are out, and all is desolation and deadness. This is not what a Christian man ought to be. There is no action of life which is too great to bow to the influence of "This do in remembrance of Me;" and there is no action of

life which is too small to be magnified, glorified, turned into a solemn sacrament, by the operation of the same motive. Are we doing that, Christian men?—living on one principle from Sunday morning to Saturday night; or are we having one principle for Sunday, and another principle for Monday, one principle for the ordinary tenor of our uneventful days, and another principle for the crises and the solemn times? Do you and I keep our religion as princes do their crown jewels—only wearing them on festive occasions, and have we another dress for week-days and working days? Do we keep our love of Christ here in our pews, with our hymn-books and our hassocks; or do we take it out into the street and the market-place with us, and work it out day by day, hour by hour, in patient endurance, in loyal love, in simple faith, finding that there is nothing little if Christ's name be crossed over it, and nothing too great if it be approached in His strength.

Is it not something to have a principle which, whilst leaving events in all their power to tell upon us, yet prevents anything from degenerating into triviality, and prevents anything from pressing upon us with an overwhelming weight? Would it not be grand if we could so go through life, as that all should be not one dead level, but one high plateau, as it were, on the mountain-top there, because all rested upon "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus"? Ah, brethren! it is possible,—not to our weak faith, perhaps; but the weakness of the faith is not inevitable. It is possible, though we *be* surrounded by many things that make it very hard. It is possible, and therefore it is

duty. It is possible, and therefore the opposite is not merely a neglect, but is positive *sin.* Oh, to have my life equable like that, with one high, diffusive influence through it all, with one simple consecration placed upon it, that one motive "The love of Christ constraineth us"! Why, it is like one of those applications of power you have often seen, where a huge hammer is lifted up, and comes down with a crash that breaks the granite in pieces, or may be allowed to fall so gently and so true that it touches without cracking a tiny nut beneath it. The *one* principle, mighty and crashing when it is wanted; and yet coming down with gentle, with accurately-proportioned force on *all* life. Or to take a higher illustration: it is like that mighty power that holds a planet in its orbit, in the wild weltering wastes of solitary space; and yet binds down the sand-grain and dust-mote to its place. Or, higher and truer still, the love of Christ that constraineth us, if it be fairly and honestly worked into and worked out by our whole life, makes us equable, calm, consistent, in shadowy but real copy of the everlasting tranquillity of our Father in heaven, who does nothing with effort, nothing with stress, nothing spasmodically, because beneath all His acts there lies one eternal, and infinite, and unchangeable, and equable love, which makes everything He does awful and great, whether it be to fill eternity or to dwell with the contrite heart. Oh to be like God in so far as we may be like Him, when being "imitators of Him as dear children," we walk in love, and have for the law and impulse of our lives, a love to Him which springs from, and is a shadow of, that love of His to us!

Then, once more: ALL LIFE, LIKE THE COMMUNION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER, MAY BE, AND OUGHT TO BE, A SHOWING-FORTH OF CHRIST'S DEATH. "Bearing about," says the Apostle in one place, as the motto for a Christian course, "bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Christ may be made manifest in our mortal bodies." And this, in fact, is the truest explanation and definition that we can give of the process by which a Christian soul grows up into the likeness of its Lord. The death of the Lord Jesus, which is shown forth in the holy Communion, as a death *for us*, and the ground of our hope, is to be shown forth in our daily walk, as a death working *in us*, and the ground of our conduct. There is not only the atoning and sacrificial aspect in Christ's death on the cross, but there is this likewise, that it stands as the example of the way by which we are, in our measure and place (as this very chapter says), to "mortify our members which are upon earth," because "we are dead with Him, and our life is hid with Christ in God." *Here*, then, we say, "That death was *for me*, and I trust it:" in our common life we are to say, "That death is working *in me*, and I am becoming conformable unto the image of His death, 'that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and so attain to the resurrection of the dead.'" And as sacred as is the one form of memorial, so sacred is the other; and closer than the outward sign which expresses the outward fact upon which we hope, is the inward reality by which alone the outward fact becomes the basis of our hope and the reason for our confidence. No man manifests the death of Christ by any outward act of

communion or worship, who is not feeling it daily in his own soul; and no man has any right to say, "I am trusting in that death as a sacrifice and salvation," who does not feel and show that he is builded on Christ, and that that death is in him a power to change him into its own likeness. It is in vain for us to say that we are relying on Christ, unless Christ be in us, slaying the old man and quickening the new. The one test of true faith is the inward possession of the Lord's Spirit; and between the sacrifice on the cross, and me the sinful man, there is no real union effected, nor any imputation and transference of merits, unless with it, proof of it, and consequence of it,—and proof of it *because* consequence of it—there be likewise the *flowing-over* from the cross to me, of the life that was in Him, and of the death that He died. You do "show forth the Lord's death till He come" not only, nor chiefly, when you take this bread and this wine in remembrance of Him, but when, in daily contact with sin, in daily practice of that bitter and yet most sweet lesson of self-denial and sacrifice, you "crucify the old man with his affections and lusts," and "rise again into newness of life." The fact is better than the symbol—the inward communion more true than the outward participation. Just in proportion as His flesh and His blood are better and more vivifying than the bread and wine which feeds the body, in the same proportion is the manifestation of His death in life a nobler thing than the manifestation of His death at any table.

And, lastly, and but one word, this communion which thus is a sample of the whole Christian life—THIS COMMUNION IS IN ITSELF ONE OF THE MIGHTIEST MEANS

FOR MAKING THE WHOLE OF LIFE LIKE ITSELF. I should be very much misunderstood if anybody were to fancy that in what I have been saying now, I have been casting anything like a sidelong depreciation on the external ordinance in which we see such deep and universal meaning. Worship, as we call it specially, is only separated from the rest of our doings in order that its spirit may flow through the whole of those doings. And it is very unlikely, even if not altogether impossible, that you will get sanctity and devotion diffused throughout a life, unless there be special acts, special times, special places, at which there shall be gathered, in order that it may come out from them with double force, the devotion which is intended to be shed abroad over the whole days. I have very little faith in the men "making all the week a Sunday," who do not make the Sunday a Sunday; and I have very little faith in the spirituality which has got up so high, that it can do without standing-ground upon earth—the religion which has become so pure that it does not need places, times, forms, the association of brethren, and the help of others! And I believe that no man, as a rule (there are exceptions, God be thanked!)—I believe that no man, as a rule, will fully be able to work out these grand principles that we have been speaking about now, who despises and turns away from the precious outward signs and visible embodiments of them which lie in social worship and the prayers of God's Church, in the preaching of God's truth, and in the ordinances of God's house. He must either be very strong who does not need them; or very, very weak who does not know that he needs

them; and, in any case, *he* will be far more apt to forget, who does not thankfully avail himself of this means of remembering. In this ordinance of the Lord's Supper, as it were, is the reservoir: out of it there come the streams that freshen and gladden the piety of daily life. Only remember, not the outward act, but the emotions which it kindles, are the reservoir. Not sitting down there, and taking that cup in your hand, but the deeper glow of feeling which is legitimately kindled then, and the intenser faith which springs therefrom; these are the fountains which will nourish verdure and life through our dusty days.

And so, brethren, there is but the one last word to say to all of you, If you want *to live* in this world, doing the duty of life, knowing the blessings of it, doing your work heartily, and yet not absorbed by it; remember that the one power whereby you can so act is, that all shall be consecrated to Christ, and done for His sake!

The burdens of life are too heavy, and its duties are too hard, for any man to bear by himself alone. No one, who plunges himself into the affairs of the world without God, can easily escape one of two sad alternatives. Either he is utterly wearied and disgusted with their triviality, and dawdles out a languid life of supercilious superiority to his work, or else he plunges passionately into it, and, like the ancient queen, dissolves in the cup the precious jewel of his own soul. There is but one escape, and that is to have Christ Jesus for our Lord, to make His will our law, His love our motive, His pattern our example, His glory our end. Young men! if you would live earnest strenuous lives, remember

that the one way of doing anything heartily, and yet not with a servile devotion, is to do it as to the Lord. Do you live so, by the faith of Jesus Christ; and then to you everything will be "apparelled in celestial light," and all will become a solemn sacrament and sacred communion with Him, when over each act is pronounced the consecration of these words—"*This* do in remembrance of Me."

LOVE AND FORGIVENESS.

ST. LUKE vii. 47.

Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.

THIS story contains three figures, three persons, who may stand for us as types or representatives of the Divine love and of all its operation in the world, of the way in which it is received or rejected, and of the causes and consequences of its reception or rejection. There is the unloving, cleanly, respectable, self-complacent Pharisee, with all his contempt for "this woman." There is the woman, with gross sin and mighty penitence, the great burst of love that is flowing out of her heart sweeping away before it, as it were, all the guilt of her transgressions. And, high over all, brooding over all, loving each, knowing each, pitying each, willing to save and be the Friend and Brother of each, is the embodied and manifested Divine Love, the knowledge of whom is love in our hearts, and is "life eternal." So that now I have simply to ask you to look with me, for a little while, at these three persons, as representing for us the Divine love that comes forth amongst sinners, and the twofold form in which that

love is received. There is, first, CHRIST THE LOVE OF GOD *appearing amongst men—the foundation of all our love to Him.* Then there is THE WOMAN, *the penitent sinner, lovingly recognising the Divine love.* And then, last, there is the PHARISEE, *the self-righteous man, ignorant of himself, and empty of all love to God.*

These are the three figures to which I ask your attention now. In the first place, we have CHRIST HERE STANDING AS A MANIFESTATION OF THE DIVINE LOVE COMING FORTH AMONGST SINNERS. His person and His words, the part He plays in this narrative, and the parable that He speaks in the course of it, have to be noticed under this head.

First, then, you have this idea,—that He, as bringing to us the love of God, shows it to us, as *not at all dependent upon our merits or deserts:* "He *frankly* forgave them both," are the deep words in which He would point us to the source and the ground of all the love of God. Brethren, have you ever thought what a wonderful and blessed truth there lies in the old words of one of the Jewish prophets, "I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy Name's sake"? The foundation of all God's love to us sinful men, that passage tells us, lies not in us, nor in anything about us, not in anything external to God Himself. He, and He alone, is the cause and reason, the motive and the end, of His own love to our world. And unless we have grasped that magnificent thought as the foundation of all our acceptance in Him, I think we have not yet learnt half of the fulness which, even in this world, may belong to our conceptions of the love of God—a love that has

no motive but Himself; a love that is not evoked even (if I may so say) by regard to His creatures' wants; a love, therefore, which is eternal, being in that Divine heart before there were creatures upon whom it could rest; a love that is its own guarantee, its own cause—safe and firm, therefore, with all the firmness and serenity of the Divine nature—incapable of being affected by our transgression, deeper than all our sins, more ancient than our very existence, the very essence and being of God Himself. "He frankly forgave them both." If you seek the source of Divine love, you must go high up into the mountains of God, and learn that it, as all other of His (shall I say) emotions, and feelings, and resolutions, and purposes, owns no reason but Himself, no motive but Himself; lies wrapped in the secret of His nature, who is all-sufficient for His own blessedness, and all whose work and being is caused by, and satisfied, and terminates in His own fulness. "God is love:" therefore beneath all considerations of what we may want,—deeper and more blessed than all thoughts of a compassion that springs from the feeling of human distress and the sight of man's misery,—lies this thought of an affection which does not need the presence of sorrow to evoke it, which does not want the touch of our finger to flow out, but by its very nature is everlasting, by its very nature is infinite, by its very nature *must be* pouring out the flood of its own joyous fulness for ever and ever!

Then again, Christ standing here for us as the representative and revelation of this Divine love which He manifests to us, tells us, too, that *whilst it is not caused by us*, but comes from the nature of God, *it is not*

turned away by our sins. "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him," says the unloving and self-righteous heart, "for she is a sinner." Ah! there is nothing more beautiful than the difference between the thought about sinful creatures which is natural to a *holy* being, and the thought about sinful creatures which is natural to a *self-righteous* being. The one is all contempt; the other, all pity. He knew what she was, and therefore He let her come close to Him with the touch of her polluted hand, and pour out the gains of her lawless life and the adornments of her former corruption upon His most blessed and most holy head. His knowledge of her as a sinner, what did it do to His love for her? It made that love gentle and tender, as knowing that she could not bear the revelation of the blaze of His purity. It smoothed His face and softened His tones, and breathed through all His knowledge and notice of her timid and yet confident approach. "Daughter, I know all about it—all thy wanderings and thy vile transgressions: I know them all, and My love is mightier than all these. *They* may be as the great sea, but My love is like the everlasting mountains, whose roots go down beneath the ocean; and My love is like the everlasting heaven, whose brightness covers it all over." God's love is Christ's love; Christ's love is God's love. And this is the lesson that we gather—that that infinite and Divine loving-kindness does not turn away from thee, my brother and my friend, because thou art a sinner, but remains hovering about thee, with wooing invitations and with gentle touches, if it may draw thee to

repentance, and open a fountain of answering affection in thy seared and dry heart. The love of God is deeper than all our sins. "For His great love wherewith He loved us, when we were dead in sins, He quickened us."

Sin is but the cloud behind which the everlasting sun lies in all its power and warmth, unaffected by the cloud; and the light will yet strike, the light of His love will yet pierce through, with its merciful shafts bringing healing in their beams, and dispersing all the pitchy darkness of man's transgression. And as the mists gather themselves up and roll away, dissipated by the heat of that sun in the upper sky, and reveal the fair earth below,—so the love of Christ shines in, melting the mist and dissipating the fog, thinning it off in its thickest places, and at last piercing its way right throught it, down to the heart of the man that has been lying beneath the oppression of this thick darkness, and who thought that the fog was the sky, and that there was no sun there above. God be thanked! the everlasting love of God that comes from the heart of His own being, and *is* there because of Himself, will never be quenched because of man's sin.

And so, in the next place, Christ teaches us here that this *Divine love, when it comes forth among sinners, necessarily manifests itself first in the form of forgiveness.* There was nothing to be done with the debtors until the debt was wiped out; there was no possibility of other gifts of the highest sort being granted to them, until the great score was cancelled and done away with. When the love of God comes down into a sinful world, it must come first and foremost as pardoning mercy. There are

no other terms upon which there can be a union betwixt the loving-kindness of God, and the emptiness and sinfulness of my heart, except only this,—that first of all there shall be the clearing away from my soul of the sins which I have gathered there, and then there is space for all other Divine things to work and to manifest themselves. Only do not fancy that when we speak about forgiveness, we simply mean that a man's position in regard to the penalties of sin is altered. That is not all the depth of the Scriptural notion of forgiveness. It includes far more than the removal of outward penalties. The heart of it all is, that the love of God rests upon the sinner, unturned away even by his sins, passing over his sins, and removing his sins for the sake of Christ. My friend, if you are talking, in general terms, about a great Divine loving-kindness that wraps you round—if you have a great deal to say, apart from the Gospel, about the love of God as being your hope and confidence,—I want you to reflect on this, that the first word which the love of God speaks to sinful men is *pardon;* and unless that is your notion of God's love, unless you look to that as the first thing of all, let me tell you, you may have before you a very fair picture of a very beautiful, tender, good-natured benevolence, but you have not nearly reached the height of the vigour and yet the tenderness of the Scripture notion of the love of God. It is not a love which says, "Well, put sin on one side, and give the man the blessings all the same," not a love which has nothing to say about that great fact of transgression, not a love which gives it the go-by, and leaves it standing: but a love which passes into the heart through the

portal of pardon, a love which grapples with the fact of sin first, and has nothing to say to a man until it has said that message to him.

And but one word more on this part of my subject—here we see the love of God thus coming from Himself; not turned away by man's sins; being the cause of forgiveness; expressing itself in pardon; and last of all, *demanding service.* "Simon, thou gavest me no water, thou gavest me no kiss, my head thou didst not anoint: I expected all these things from thee—I desired them all from thee: my love came that they might spring in thy heart;—thou hast not given them; my love is wounded, as it were disappointed, and it turns away from thee!" Yes, after all that we have said about the freeness and fulness, the unmerited, and uncaused, and unmotived nature of that Divine affection—after all that we have said about its being the source of every blessing to man, asking nothing from him, but giving everything to him; it still remains true, that God's love, when it comes to men, comes that it may evoke an answering echo in the human heart, and "though it might be much bold to enjoin, yet for love's sake rather beseeches" us to give unto Him who has given all unto us. There, then, stands forth in the narrative, Christ as a revelation of the Divine love amongst sinners.

Now, in the second place, let us look for a moment, at "THIS WOMAN," as the representative of a class of character—THE PENITENT LOVINGLY RECOGNISING THE DIVINE LOVE. The words which I have read as my text contain a statement as to the woman's character: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved

much." Allow me just one word of explanation, in the shape of exposition, on these words. Great blunders have been built upon them. I daresay you have seen epitaphs—(*I* have)—written often on gravestones with this misplaced idea on them,—"Very sinful; but there was a great deal of love in the person; and for the sake of the love, God passed by the sin!" Now, when Christ says "she loved much," He does not mean to say that her love was the cause of her forgiveness—not at all. He means to say that her love was the proof of her forgiveness, and that it was so because her love was a consequence of her forgiveness. As, for instance, we might say, "the woman is in great distress, for she weeps;" but we do not mean thereby that the weeping is the reason of the distress, but the means of our knowing the sorrow. It is the proof because it is the consequence. Or (to put it into the simplest shape) the love does not go before the forgiveness, but the forgiveness goes before the love; and because the love comes after the forgiveness, it is the sign of the forgiveness. That this is the true interpretation, you will see, if you look back for a moment at the narrative which precedes, where He says, "He frankly forgave them both: tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most?" Pardon is the pre-requisite of love, and love is a consequence of the sense of forgiveness.

This, then, is the first thing to observe: all true love to God is preceded in the heart by these two things—a sense of sin, and an assurance of pardon. Brethren, there is no love possible—real, deep, genuine, worthy of being called love of God—which does not start with the

belief of my own transgression, and with the thankful reception of forgiveness in Christ. You do nothing to get pardon for yourselves; but unless you *have* the pardon you have no love to God. I know that sounds a very hard thing—I know that many will say it is very narrow and very bigoted, and will ask, "Do you mean to tell me that the man whose bosom glows with gratitude because of earthly blessings, has no love—that all that natural religion which is in people, apart from this sense of forgiveness in Christ, do you mean to tell me that this is not all genuine?" Yes, most assuredly; and I believe the Bible and man's conscience say the same thing. I do not for one moment deny that there may be in the hearts of those who are in the grossest ignorance of themselves as transgressors, certain emotions of instinctive gratitude and natural religiousness, directed to some higher power dimly thought of as the author of their blessings and the source of much gladness: but has *that* kind of thing got any living power in it? I demur to its right to be called love to God at all, for this reason—because it seems to me that the object that is loved is not God, but a fragment of God. He who but says, "I owe to Him breath and all things; in Him I live and move, and have my being," has left out one-half at least of the Scriptural conception of God. Your God, my friend, is not the God of the Bible, unless He stands before you clothed in infinite loving-kindness indeed; but clothed also in strict and rigid justice. Is your God perfect and entire? If you say that you love Him, and if you do so, is it as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Have you meditated on the depths of the

requirements of His law? Have you stood silent and stricken at the thought of the blaze of His righteousness? Have you passed through all the thick darkness and the clouds with which He surrounds His throne, and forced your way at last into the inner light where He dwells? Or is it a vague divinity that you worship and love? Which? Ah, if a man study his Bible, and try to find out for himself, from its veracious records, who and what manner of God the living God is, there will be no love in his heart to that Being except only when he has flung himself at His feet, and said, "Father of eternal purity, and God of all holiness and righteousness, forgive Thy child, a sinful broken man—forgive Thy child, for the sake of Thy Son!" That, and that alone, is the road by which we come to possess the love of God, as a practical power, filling and sanctifying our souls; and such is the God to whom alone our love ought to be rendered;—and I tell you (or rather the Bible tells you, and the Gospel and the cross of Christ tell you), *no love without pardon*, no fellowship and sonship without the sense of sin and the acknowledgment of foul transgression!

So much, then, for what precedes the love of Christ in the heart; now a word as to what follows. "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much." The sense of sin precedes forgiveness: forgiveness precedes love; love precedes all acceptable and faithful service. If you want *to do*, love. If you want *to know*, love! This poor woman, she knew Christ a vast deal better than that Pharisee there. He said, "This man is not a prophet; He does not understand the woman." Ay, but the woman knew herself better than the Pharisee knew him-

self, knew herself better than the Pharisee knew her, knew Christ, above all, a vast deal better than he did. Love is the *gate of all knowledge.*

This poor woman brings her box of ointment, a relic perhaps of past evil life, and once meant for her own adornment, and pours it on His head, lavishes offices of service which to the unloving heart seem bold in the giver and cumbersome to the receiver. It is little she can do, but she does it. Her full heart demands expression, and is relieved by utterance in deeds. The deeds are spontaneous, welling out at the bidding of an inward impulse, not drawn out by the force of an external command. It matters not what practical purpose they serve. The motive of them makes their glory. Love prompts them, love justifies them, and His love interprets them, and His love accepts them. The love which flows from the sense of forgiveness is *the source of all obedience* as well as the means of all knowledge.

Brethren, we differ from each other in all respects but one, "We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God;" we all need the love of Christ; it is offered to us all; but, believe me, the sole handle by which you can lay hold of it, is the feeling of your own sinfulness and need of pardon. I preach to you a love that you do not want to buy, a mercy that you do not need to bribe, a grace that is all independent of your character, and condition, and merits, which issues from God for ever, and is lying at your doors if you will take it. You are a sinful man; Christ died for you. He comes to give you His forgiving mercy. Take it, be at rest. So shalt thou love

and know and do, and so shall He love and guide *thee!*

Now one word, and then I have done. A third character stands here—THE UNLOVING AND SELF-RIGHTEOUS MAN, ALL IGNORANT OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST. He is the antithesis of the woman and her character. You remember the traditional peculiarities and characteristics of the class to which he belonged. He is a fair specimen of the whole of them. Respectable in life, rigid in morality, unquestionable in orthodoxy; no sound of suspicion having ever come near his belief in all the traditions of the elders; intelligent and learned, high up among the ranks of Israel! What was it that made this man's morality a piece of dead nothingness? What was it that made his orthodoxy just so many dry words, from out of which all the life had gone? What was it! This one thing: there was no love in it. As I said, Love is the foundation of all obedience. Without it, morality degenerates into mere casuistry. Love is the foundation of all knowledge. Without it, religion degenerates into a chattering about Moses, and doctrines, and theories; a thing that will neither kill nor make alive, that never gave life to a single soul or blessing to a single heart, and never put strength into any hand in the conflict and strife of daily life. There is no more contemptible and impotent thing on the face of the earth than morality divorced from love, and religious thoughts divorced from a heart full of the love of God. Quick corruption or long decay, and in either case death and putrefaction, are the end of these! You and I need that lesson, my friends. It is of no use for us to condemn Pharisees

that have been dead and in their graves for eighteen hundred years. The same thing besets us all; we all of us try to get away from the centre, and dwell contented on the surface. We are satisfied to take the flowers, and stick them into our little gardens, without the roots to them; when of course they all die out! People may try to cultivate virtue without religion, and to acquire correct notions of moral and spiritual truth, and partially and temporarily they may succeed; but the one will be a yoke of bondage, and the other a barren theory. I repeat, *love* is the basis of all knowledge and of all right-doing. If you have got that firm foundation laid in the soul, then the knowledge and the practice will be builded in God's own good time; and if not, the higher you build the temple, and the more aspiring are its cloud-pointing pinnacles, the more certain will be its toppling some day, and the more awful will be the ruin when it comes. The Pharisee was contented with himself; and so there was no sense of sin in him, therefore there was no penitent recognition of Christ as forgiving and loving him, therefore there was no love to Christ. Because there was no love, there was neither light nor heat in his soul, his knowledge was barren notions, and his painful doings were soul-destructive self-righteousness.

And so it all comes round to the one blessed message: My friend, God hath loved us with an everlasting love. He has provided an eternal redemption and pardon for us. If you would know Christ at all, you must go to Him as a sinful man, or you are shut out from Him altogether. If you *will* go to Him as a sinful being, fling yourself down there, not try to make yourself

better, but say, "I am all full of unrighteousness and transgression: let Thy love fall upon me and heal me;" you will get the answer, and in your heart there shall begin to live and grow up a root of love to Him, which shall at last effloresce into all knowledge and into all purity of obedience; for he that hath had much forgiven, loveth much; and "he that loveth knoweth God," and "dwelleth in God, and God in Him!"

THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE EARNEST OF THE INHERITANCE.

EPHESIANS i. 13, 14.

Ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance.

THERE are two ideas conveyed in that expression of being "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" —one, the *manner* of the operation; and the other, the *purpose* of it. Sealing implies the direct contact of the seal with the thing sealed, and involves the idea that the consequence of that sealing is the impression on the thing sealed of the device that is carved on the seal. The purpose of that sealing is, security and safety. The thought, then, is just this, that God's Holy Spirit comes into real contact with the Christian man's soul, and there stamps and impresses the character and copy of its own likeness; and that these God-like desires, feelings, emotions, thoughts, the whole reflected character of the Divine majesty and holiness, as mirrored and moulded in a believer's heart, are the pledge of the security of that man, and of the certainty that he will be kept in the way in which he goes. If you take *that* for your doctrine

of final perseverance, there is no fear of its ever being turned to anything but the noblest purposes, or being found to contain anything but the mightiest inducements to walking in the Divine life, and to seeking to possess that mirrored image of the Divine Word.

And then, again, this sealing which is essentially the likeness of God in the Christian heart, is, says the Apostle, the "earnest of our inheritance." In that word "earnest," too, there are two ideas conveyed,—a *sample*, and a *pledge*. The "earnest" is the soldier's shilling, the bit of turf by which the purchaser takes possession of his estate, the wages given at the beginning of the bargain. It is part of the wages, part of the estate, part of the payment,—at once a sample of the bulk, and a pledge that all the rest is to come. That is to say, the likeness of God that is wrought in our hearts by God's Spirit, is itself at once our best information as to what the inheritance is like, and our surest guarantee that the inheritance will one day be ours.

So much, then, for the meaning of the passage before us. Let us try to draw out the main points suggested by it. First, we get information here as to THE CHARACTER OF THE INHERITANCE; secondly, as to THE GROUNDS ON WHICH WE MAY BE CONFIDENT OF POSSESSING IT.

First, then, the Holy Spirit of promise is "the *earnest* of our inheritance;" therefore, we understand something of THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THAT INHERITANCE. The teaching of the passage is, that heaven is likest the selectest moments of devotion that a Christian has on earth. If you want to know most really and most truly what that "rest which remaineth for the people of God"

is, think of what the fruits of God's working in your hearts have already been, and expand and glorify these into "an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection." The fruits of God's Spirit—peace, holiness, fellowship with Him, calm love, deep joy, perfect power, these things are the elements of that inheritance which remaineth for God's people. And, brethren! if we want to know what it is to which we are hastening, and what that is which we ought to be longing for, let us take the grand teaching of such passages as this, and not befool ourselves with standing outside in the circumference and circumstances, but get into the centre and substantial reality, and feel that though it is much and blessed to think of the inheritance as being the putting away of all that is sorrowful and dark in the conditions of this life; though it is much to think of that inheritance as being the time when we are no longer hemmed in by this feeble body and tortured by constant change, and needing to live by constant effort; yet that it is more to say, "Heaven is like my present love to God, only better; heaven is like my present lowly devotion, only lofty and settled; heaven is like the knowledge that comes to me even here 'through a glass, in a riddle,' only then direct and solving every mystery; heaven is the Spirit of God perfected; earth is the Spirit of God begun!" Oh, then, what a little thing that mighty Death dwindles to be, how small that becomes, which only affects, and that for a moment, the circumstances of a man, but does not touch the indwelling being of a man! What a little thing that death is, which simply is the means for the coming of the superlative of what here we

have in the positive! What a grand thing the life is into the midst of which can be injected, as it were,—like the branching veins of silver in the hard rock—the glorious rich metal of this Divine influence! What a solemn and sublime thought it is, that a Christian carries through this world in his heart no smaller possession than the productive seed which only needs its natural climate and its fostering skies to burst into the unfading flower of endless and perfect glory! Ah, brethren, the truths that people now-a-days are sometimes flinging in our faces as if we did not believe them—such as, "here or nowhere must a man find his heaven; a man's blessedness consists not in *where* he is, but in *what* he is; heaven must be *within* a man, and not merely round about him"—all these half-truths, where did they come from? Out of the laboratory of an unscriptural spiritualism? No; there is not, in all its instruments, one alembic that can distil them. They come from that truth that the Spirit of God in us is the earnest of heaven for us; and he that begins to love, and trust, and rejoice in God here, carries the essence of heaven wheresoever he goes.

The text, then, teaches us, on the one hand, how we are to regard heaven; and on the other, how we are to regard the spiritual experiences of the present. Heaven is the perfecting of the life of the Spirit begun here, and the loftiest attainments of that life here are but the beginnings and infantile movements of immature beings.

From the existing experience we argue the future blessedness; and then, catching a gleam of the future blessedness, we turn round and look at the present experience, and discern at the same moment how great

that must be which transcends it, and how small that is which is going to greaten into heaven! What we know, and love, and believe, and rejoice in, here on earth, is the manna in the wilderness; and we are waiting for the better and settled food of the permanent home. We have here the prelibation, the first taste and draught, but the full cup is kept for us above. We wet our lips, in the midst of the hot struggle upon earth, with the sacred joys, hastily quaffed, of still communion and thankful devotion; but the full draught, the best wine, is kept till we get yonder, when the perfecting of the Spirit comes. Here, we drink of the brook by the way, in the heat of the battle and the pursuit; there we shall lift up the head, and drink of "the river of the water of life that proceedeth out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." The best of earth is the shadow of heaven. The shadow is like the substance; but oh! the substance —"eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him." Only, we can say, all this that a Christian has here, when into his expanding heart there comes those sweet and angel visitants of joy and love, who are but the outriders and fair messengers of the great band of the heavenly host; all this is but the "earnest of the inheritance," and bears the same proportion to its perfect fulness that the handful of turf does to the broad acres and the fertile lands of which it is the first instalment and certain guarantee.

Secondly, we gather from this passage some thoughts with regard to THE TRUE GROUNDS OF CERTAINTY THAT WE SHALL ULTIMATELY POSSESS THE FULNESS OF THE

INHERITANCE. The true ground of certainty lies in this, that you have the Spirit in your heart, operating its own likeness, and moulding you, sealing you, after its own stamp and image. This idea is a very grand and fruitful one, if one had time to dwell upon it and work it out at all; but I can only cast a hasty glance at it, and leave it for your own expansion. There are many grounds on which, as I think, this principle rests—that the present possession of this Holy Spirit is the true certainty of the full possession hereafter. Let me try to illustrate one or two of them, very cursorily and imperfectly.

First, then, *the very fact of such a relation between man and God, is itself the great assurance of immortality and everlasting life.* That is exactly what Christ said to the Pharisees when they came to Him, and asked Him about a future state of existence. His answer was, "Take your own old Book, and what does *it* say to you? God is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: think about that, and it will open itself out into this assurance,—the soul which has such a relation to God as that God says to him, 'I am *thy* God,' can never die." The fact of the relation, the mere fact that between me and God, through His Spirit, there has come this close, intimate, marvellous connexion, is the great guarantee of everlasting life. It is impossible that where there has been this brought about, there should ever come the annihilation of the creature, or there should ever come the cessation and the interruption of that fellowship. All religion has immortality in it. God will not slay His own child. If the Spirit is mine here, then the spirit in which that

Spirit dwells, is gifted with immortality by its indwelling; and the temple that God has entered shall never be desecrated or cast down.

Then, again, the *characteristics that are produced by this Holy Spirit's indwelling, both in their perfectness and their imperfection*, are the great guarantee of the inheritance being ours. For instance, the Christian finds in his heart certain desires, wishes, feelings, that he knows to be the offspring and operation of a far higher power than his own; but he finds that these are all crossed and dashed by two kinds of imperfection. On the one hand, they are transitory and shallow; on the other hand, they never can pour themselves forth upon the world, and exhibit themselves for what they are. The imperfections of our present Christian life are of these two sorts—first, imperfection in the depth, purity, constancy, of the experience and emotions themselves; and, then, imperfection in the way in which the poor body and the feeble life reveal and set forth that which we are.

But the Spirit of God has wrought all the good that is in us; and the imperfections which still cloud the brightness of His work are the lingering remains of our own evil nature. God's work is begun, else we had no faith, no love. But our faith is wavering, our love is blended fire and ice; wherefore God's work is clearly not completed. What, then, is the natural conclusion from the fact which is certified to every Christian, alike by the good which is God's, and by the evil that is his own? What is the natural conclusion from the fact that God's work is begun, but is imperfect? Is it not this—that that work must go on till it be finished?

"Man may change, but Thou art God, and Thy nature is perfection." "God is not a man that He should lie: nor the son of man, that He should repent." The perfecting of His work is the only termination of the Creator's work. And just as when God took in hand to make a world, He could not rest from His labours until He and angels could say, "It is all very good," so, and in precisely like manner, when God begins the nobler creation in any heart, it cannot be that anything short of the full completion and entire working out of His purpose and His plan, shall be the goal and end of His activity. If a Spirit, all-powerful and infinite, is working in me, never can its work be finished until its work is perfected. The gifts and calling of God are "without repentance" on His part; and every man, therefore, that feels within him some feeble beginnings of a Divine power stirring in his soul, is warranted and bound to lay hold alike of his sin and of his righteousness, of his weakness and of his strength, of his love and of his torpor, of his obedience and of his rebellion, and say, These tell me that the time will come when God's idea shall be wrought out in me, and my nature shall correspond to the power which worketh in me,—when the outward expression of my life shall correspond to the inward spirit that is vitalizing the whole. Brethren, I say not to any Christian, Be contented with your weakness and imperfection. I say not to any Christian, God works magically in you, and you can leave Him alone to work it out. I say not to any such, There is an absolute, arbitrary, supernatural necessity, by virtue of which you, having received this

gift of grace, shall keep on, irrespective of yourself, of your own energies and strivings, and be glorified at the end. But I do say to you, If you are a Christian, then you have the right not to be cast down by your weaknesses and your sins; but looking alike on what has already been done by God's grace within your heart, and on the outlying field which still remains to be won, the deadness not yet energized by Him, you have a right to feel, Thank God! my imperfections preach to me, though with a darkened face, and singing it in a minor key; they preach to me the same message as God's angels of light declare to me—that "there remaineth a rest for the people of God," when all the contradictions between what I would be and what I am, together with all the disproportion between what I feel I am and what I am able to show myself to be, shall have passed away for ever; when *to will* will be *to do*, and when the sons of God shall be manifested for what they are, and be what God meant them to be—perfect in holiness, and completely modelled by and likened to the impressing seal of God's perfect and omnipotent Spirit.

Once more, and but a word, I think the text entitles us to say too, that this Holy Spirit of promise gives the certainty of our possession of the inheritance, not only because of the two reasons I have suggested—namely, from the very fact of its present possession, and from the characteristics of its present operation, but also because that Holy Spirit in a man's heart does *make him desire and believe in the inheritance*. It may seem a very strange thing to say, it may seem almost absurd and a paradox that

the fact of assurance is the pledge of possession—that a man has a right to believe that he will get a thing because he *does* believe that he will get it. But if we really believe in a Spirit from whom all holy desires do proceed, then the existence of a longing in a devout soul, and of an expectation that that longing shall be satisfied, is itself a ground for believing that the desires will be fulfilled, and the expectations be proved well-based, provided always that they are not the offspring of the mere natural man, but of that indwelling Spirit. God does not deceive. The vision of the future is not a baseless fabric. Call it a dream if you will, but ah! the time will come when "we shall awake from the dream, and find the dream again, because we have lost nothing but only the sleep."

Yes, brethren, unless there be an end to all certainties whatever, and unless a man be condemned to dwell here and everywhere in a world of illusions, and never get beyond the magic circle of his own spirit—the certainty of eternal life, wrought by the Spirit of God in the heart, is self-evidencing, legible by its own light. It is itself the deepest and grandest proof that there is an outward reality that corresponds to itself, that there is a fountain at which that thirst of our hearts can be quenched and slaked for ever. God be thanked that the old ordinary argument for endless life, for mere immortality—the one that is based on the fact that all men have believed it,—gets this glorification in the Christian scheme! We have not only to argue that there is an eternal life, else how does it come that everywhere people have been driven to believe that there is one? but on the Christian level we

can argue there is a heaven of communion with God, else how does it come that in direct proportion as God's Spirit is working mightily in a man's heart, in that same proportion does there quicken in his soul the longing for, and do there brighten to his eye the evidence and certainty of, the peace and joy of that future possession? And so, brethren, *there* are the subjective grounds of this blessed hope—the fact of the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in you; His perfectness and yet the deficiencies of His present working; and the fact that always He operates the longing for, and the belief in, this endless glory. Learn then how sacred that heart of yours has become, if it be the holy place of the tabernacle of the Highest. And, just as men that would see the stars at noonday, look not into the heavens above them, but down into some deep, dark well; when *you*, Christian, would have the highest pattern and the surest pledge of your immortal blessedness, gaze with fixed eye down into the depths of that spirit of yours where God's Spirit abides; and though at first you may see nothing but its own cold waters, look and ever look, and you will see at last, glimmering and shimmering beneath its surface, tremulous light points, the shadows of the stars; for the Holy Spirit that is mirrored there, is "the earnest," the sample, and the evidence "of the inheritance."

And, before we close, let us fix this in our thoughts, that no person has any right to think he will end in heaven, unless he have the consciousness that feebly but really he has the Spirit of God in his heart. My friend, if heaven does not begin here for you, it will never begin yonder. I beseech you, ask yourself what magical

power should there be in death to assoil you from your sins, and make you "meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light." If life has not made you, by God's grace through faith, holy—think you, will death without faith do it? The cold waters of that narrow stream are no purifying bath in which you may wash and be clean. No, no! as you go down into them, you will come up from them. If here you have not the Holy Spirit, which makes holy your hearts, the inheritance will never be yours—never. Here, or nowhere, you must begin. And they only have that Holy Spirit who receive it through Christ, and they only are heirs of God who are content to hold their possession through Him who is the true Lord of it, and who made us joint-heirs with Himself. Then, my brethren, lay hold on Him. "This is the Heir; come, let us" *trust* "Him, that the inheritance may be ours."

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

ROMANS viii. 16.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

THE sin of the world is *a false confidence*, a careless, complacent taking for granted that a man is a Christian when he is not. The fault, and sorrow, and weakness of the Church is *a false diffidence*, an anxious fear whether a man be a Christian when he is. There are none so far away from false confidence as those who tremble lest they be cherishing it. There are none so inextricably caught in its toils as those who are all unconscious of *its* existence and of *their* danger. The two things, the false confidence and the false diffidence, are perhaps more akin to one another than they look at first sight. Their opposites, at all events—the true confidence, which is faith in Christ; and the true diffidence, which is utter distrust of myself—are identical. But there may sometimes be, and there often is the combination of a real confidence and a false diffidence, the presence of faith, and the doubt whether it be present. Many Christians go through life with this as the prevail-

ing temper of their minds—a doubt sometimes arising almost to agony, and sometimes dying down into passive patient acceptance of the condition, as inevitable—a doubt whether, after all, they be not, as they say, "deceiving themselves;" and in the perverse ingenuity with which that state of mind is constantly marked, they manage to distil for themselves a bitter vinegar of self-accusation out of grand words in the Bible, that were meant to afford them but the wine of gladness and of consolation.

Now this great text which I have ventured to read to-day—not with the idea that I can exalt it or say anything worthy of it, but simply in the hope of clearing away some misapprehensions—is one that has often and often tortured the mind of Christians. They say of themselves, I know nothing of any such evidence: I am not conscious of any Spirit bearing witness with my spirit. Instead of looking to other sources to answer the question whether they are Christians or not—and then, having answered it, thinking thus, That text asserts that *all* Christians have this witness, therefore certainly I have it in some shape or other, they say to themselves, I do not feel anything that corresponds with my idea of what such a grand, supernatural voice as the witness of God's Spirit in my spirit must needs be; and therefore I doubt whether I am a Christian at all. I should be thankful if the attempt I make now to set before you what seems to me to be the true teaching of the passage, should be, with God's help, the means of lifting some little part of the burden from some hearts that are right, and that only long to know that they are, in order to be at rest.

"*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*"

The general course of thought which I wish to leave with you may be summed up thus: Our cry "Father" is the Witness that we are Sons. That cry is not simply ours, but it is the voice of God's Spirit. The Divine Witness in our spirits is subject to the ordinary influences which affect our spirits.

Let us take these three thoughts, and dwell on them for a little while.

I. OUR CRY "FATHER" IS THE WITNESS THAT WE ARE SONS.

Mark the terms of the passage: "The Spirit itself beareth witness *with* our spirit." It is not so much a revelation made to my spirit, considered as the recipient of the testimony, as a revelation made in or with my spirit considered as co-operating in the testimony. It is not that my spirit says one thing, bears witness that I am a child of God; and that the Spirit of God comes in by a distinguishable process, with a separate evidence, to say Amen to my persuasion; but it is that there is one testimony which has a conjoint origin—the origin from the Spirit of God as true source, and the origin from my own soul as recipient and co-operant in that testimony. From the teaching of this passage, or from any of the language which Scripture uses with regard to the inner witness, it is not to be inferred that there shall rise up in a Christian's heart, from some origin consciously beyond the sphere of his own nature, a voice with which he has nothing to do; which at once, by its own character, by something peculiar and distinguishable about

it, by something strange in its nature, or out of the ordinary course of human thinking, shall certify itself to be not *his* voice at all, but *God's* voice. That is not the direction in which you are to look for the witness of God's Spirit. It is evidence borne, indeed, by the Spirit of God; but it is evidence borne not only to our spirit, but through it, *with* it. The testimony is one—the testimony of a man's own emotion, and own conviction, and own desire—the cry, Abba, Father! So far, then, as the form of the evidence goes, you are not to look for it in anything ecstatic, arbitrary, parted off from your own experience by a broad line of demarcation; but you are to look into the experience which at first sight you would claim most exclusively for your own, and to try and find out whether *there* there be not working with your soul, working through it, working beneath it, distinct from it but not distinguishable from it by anything but its consequences and its fruitfulness—a deeper voice than yours —a "still small voice," no whirlwind, nor fire, nor earthquake—but the voice of God speaking in secret, taking the voice and tones of your own heart and your own consciousness, and saying to you, Thou art my child, inasmuch as, operated by my grace, and mine inspiration alone—there rises, tremblingly but truly, in thine own soul the cry, Abba, Father.

So much, then, for the *form* of this evidence—my own conviction. Then with regard to the *substance* of it: conviction of what? The text itself does not tell us what is the evidence which the Spirit bears, and by reason of which we have a right to conclude that we are the children of God. The previous verse tells us. I

have partially anticipated what I have to say on that point, but it will bear a little further expansion. "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." "The Spirit itself," by this means of our cry, Abba, Father, "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The substance, then, of the conviction which is lodged in the human spirit by the testimony of the Spirit of God is not primarily directed to our relation or feelings to God, but to a far grander thing than that—to God's feelings and relation to us. Now I want you to think for one moment, before I pass on, how entirely different the whole aspect of this witness of the Spirit of which Christian men speak so much, and sometimes with so little understanding, becomes according as you regard it mistakenly as being the direct testimony to you that you are a child of God, or rightly as being the direct testimony to you that God is your Father. The two things seem to be the same, but they are not. In the one case, the false case, the mistaken interpretation, we are left to this, that a man has no deeper certainty of his condition, no better foundation for his hope, than what is to be drawn from the presence or absence of certain emotions within his own heart. In the other case, we are admitted into this "wide place," that all which is our own is second and not first, and that the true basis of all our confidence lies not in the thought of what we are and feel to God, but in the thought of what God is and feels to us. And instead, therefore, of being left to labour for ourselves, painfully to search amongst the dust and rubbish of our own hearts;

we are taught to sweep away all that crumbled, rotten surface, and to go down to the living rock that lies beneath it; we are taught to say, in the words of the book of Isaiah, "Doubtless Thou art our Father—we are all an unclean thing; our iniquities, like the wind, have carried us away;" there is nothing stable in us; our own resolutions, they are swept away like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, by the first gust of temptation;—but what of that?—"*in those is continuance, and we shall be saved!*" Ah, brethren! expand this thought of the conviction that God is my Father, as being the basis of all my confidence that I am His child, into its widest and grandest form; and it leads us up to the blessed old conviction, I am nothing, my holiness is nothing, my resolutions are nothing, my faith is nothing, my energies are nothing; I stand stripped, and barren, and naked of everything, and I fling myself out of myself into the merciful arms of my Father in heaven! There is all the difference in the world between searching for evidence of my sonship, and seeking to get the conviction of God's fatherhood. The one is an endless, profitless, self-tormenting task; the other is the light and liberty, the glorious liberty, of the children of God.

And so the *substance* of the Spirit's evidence is the direct conviction based on the revelation of God's infinite love and fatherhood in Christ the Son, that God is *my* Father; from which direct conviction I come to the conclusion, the inference, the second thought, Then I may trust that I am his son. But why? Because of anything in me? No: because of Him. The very emblem of fatherhood and sonship might teach us that

that depends upon the Father's will and the Father's heart. The Spirit's testimony has for *form* my own conviction: and for *substance* my humble cry, "Oh Thou, my Father in heaven!" Brethren, is not that a far truer and nobler kind of thing to preach than saying, Look into your own heart for strange, extraordinary, distinguishable signs which shall mark you out as God's child—and which are proved to be His Spirit's, because they are separated from the ordinary human consciousness? Is it not far more blessed for us, and more honouring to Him who works the sign, when we say, that it is to be found in no out-of-rule, miraculous evidence, but in the natural (which is in reality supernatural) working of His Spirit in the heart which is its recipient, breeding there the conviction that God is my Father? And oh, if I am speaking to any to whom that text, with all its light and glory, has seemed to lift them up into an atmosphere too rare and a height too lofty for their heavy wings and unused feet, if I am speaking to any Christian man to whom this word has been like the cherubim and flaming sword, bright and beautiful, but threatening and repellent when it speaks of a Spirit that bears witness with our spirit—I ask you simply to take the passage for yourself, and carefully and patiently to examine it, and see if it be not true what I have been saying, that your trembling conviction—sister and akin as it is to your deepest distrust and sharpest sense of sin and unworthiness—that your trembling conviction of a love mightier than your own, everlasting and all-faithful, is indeed the selectest sign that God can give you that you *are* His child. Oh, brethren and sisters! be confident; for it is not false confidence;

be confident if up from the depths of that dark well of your own sinful heart there rises sometimes, through all the bitter waters, unpolluted and separate, a sweet conviction, forcing itself upward, that God hath love in His heart, and God is *my* Father. Be confident "the Spirit itself beareth witness with your spirit."

And now, secondly, THAT CRY IS NOT SIMPLY OURS, BUT IT IS THE VOICE OF GOD'S SPIRIT. Our own convictions *are* ours because they are God's. Our own souls possess these emotions of love and tender desire going out to God—our own spirits possess them; but our own spirits did not originate them. They are ours by property; they are His by source. The spirit of a Christian man has no good thought in it, no true thought, no perception of the grace of God's Gospel, no holy desire, no pure resolution, which is not stamped with the sign of a higher origin, and is not the witness of God's Spirit in his spirit. The passage before us tells us that the sense of fatherhood which is in the Christian's heart, and becomes his cry, comes from God's Spirit. This passage, and that in the Epistle to the Galatians which is almost parallel, put this truth very forcibly, when taken in connexion. "Ye have received," says the text before us, "the spirit of adoption, whereby *we* cry, Abba, Father." The variation in the Epistle to the Galatians is this: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, *crying* (the Spirit crying), Abba, Father." So in the one text, the cry is regarded as the voice of the believing heart; and in the other the same cry is regarded as the voice of God's Spirit. And these two things are both true: the one would want its founda

tion if it were not for the other; the cry of the Spirit is nothing for me unless it be appropriated by me. I do not need to plunge here into metaphysical speculation of any sort, but simply to dwell upon the plain practical teaching of the Bible—a teaching, verified, I believe, by every Christian's experience, if he will search into it—that everything in him which makes the Christian life, is not his, but is God's by origin, and his only by gift and inspiration. And the whole doctrine of my text is built on this one thought—without the Spirit of God in your heart, you never can recognise God as your Father. That in us which runs, with love, and childlike faith, and reverence, to the place "where His honour dwelleth," that in us which says Father, is kindred with God, and is not the simple, unhelped, unsanctified human nature. There is no ascent of the human desires above their source. And wherever in a heart there springs up heavenward a thought, a wish, a prayer, a trembling confidence, it is because that came down first from heaven, and rises to seek its level again. All that is divine in man comes from God. All that tends towards God in man, is God's voice in the human heart; and were it not for the possession and operation, the sanctifying and quickening, of a living divine Spirit granted to us, our souls would for ever cleave to the dust and dwell upon earth, nor ever rise to God and live in the light of His presence. Every Christian, then, may be sure of this, that howsoever feeble may be the thought and conviction in his heart of God's fatherhood, *he* did not work it, he received it only, cherished it, thought of it, watched over it, was careful not to quench it; but in origin it was God's, and it is

now and ever the voice of the Divine Spirit in the child's heart.

But, my friends, if this principle be true, it does not apply only to this one single attitude of the believing soul when it cries, Abba, Father; it must be widened out to comprehend the whole of a Christian's life, outward and inward, which is not sinful, and darkened with actual transgression. To all the rest of his being, to everything in heart and life which is right and pure, the same truth applies. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit" in every perception of God's word which is granted, in every revelation of His counsel which dawns upon our darkness, in every aspiration after Him which lifts us above the smoke and dust of this dim spot, in every holy resolution, in every thrill and throb of love and desire. Each of these is mine—inasmuch as in my heart it is experienced and transacted; it is mine, inasmuch as I am not a mere dead piece of matter, the passive recipient of a magical and supernatural grace; but it is God's; and therefore, and therefore only, has it come to be mine!

And if it be objected, that this opens a wide door to all manner of delusion, and that there is no more dangerous thing than for a man to confound his own thoughts with the operations of God's Spirit, let me just give you (following the context before us) the one guarantee and text which the Apostle lays down. He says, "There is a witness from God in your spirits." You may say, That witness, if it come in the form of these convictions in my own heart, I may mistake and falsely read. Well, then, here is an outward guarantee. "As many as are

led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;" and so, on the regions both of heart and of life the consecrating thought,—God's work, and God's Spirit's work, —is stamped. The heart with its love, the head with its understanding, the conscience with its quick response to the law of duty, the will with its resolutions,—these are all, as sanctified by Him, the witness of His Spirit; and the life with its strenuous obedience, with its struggles against sin and temptation, with its patient persistence in the quiet path of ordinary duty, as well as with the times when it rises into heroic stature of resignation or allegiance, the martyrdom of death and the martyrdom of life, this too, is all (in so far as it is pure and right) the work of that same Spirit. The test of the inward conviction is the outward life; and they that have the witness of the Spirit within them, have the light of their life lit by the Spirit of God, whereby they may read the handwriting on the heart, and be sure that it is God's and not their own!

And now, lastly, THIS DIVINE WITNESS IN OUR SPIRITS IS SUBJECT TO THE ORDINARY INFLUENCES WHICH AFFECT OUR SPIRITS. The notion often prevails that if there be in the heart this Divine witness of God's Spirit, it must needs be perfect, clearly indicating its origin by an exemption from all that besets ordinary human feelings, that it must be a strong, uniform, never flickering, never darkening, and perpetual light, a kind of vestal fire burning always on the altar of the heart! The passage before us, and all others that speak about the matter, give us the directly opposite notion. The Divine Spirit, when it enters into the narrow room of the human spirit,

condescends to submit itself, not wholly, but to such an extent as practically for our present purpose *is* wholly—to submit itself to the ordinary laws and conditions and contingencies which befall and regulate our own human nature. Christ came into the world Divine: He was "found in fashion as a man," in form a servant; the humanity that He wore limited (if you like), regulated, modified, the manifestation of the divinity that dwelt in it. And not otherwise is the operation of God's Holy Spirit when it comes to dwell in a human heart. There too, working through man, *it* "is found in fashion as a man;" and though the origin of the conviction be of God, and though the voice in my heart be not only my voice, but God's voice there, it will obey those same laws which make human thoughts and emotions vary, and fluctuate, flicker and flame up again, burn bright and burn low, according to a thousand circumstances. The witness of the Spirit, if it were yonder in heaven, would shine like a perpetual star; the witness of the Spirit, here in the heart on earth, burns like a flickering flame, never to be extinguished, but still not always bright, wanting to be trimmed, and needing to be guarded from rude blasts. Else, brother, what does an Apostle mean when he says to you and me, "Quench not the Spirit"? what does he mean when he says to us, "Grieve not the Spirit"? What does the whole teaching which enjoins on us, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning," and "What I say to you, I say to all, Watch!" mean, unless it means this, that God-given as (God be thanked!) that conviction of fatherhood is, it is not given in such a way as that, irrespective of our carefulness, irrespective

of our watching, it shall burn on—the same and unchangeable? The Spirit's witness *comes from God*, therefore it is veracious, Divine, omnipotent; but the Spirit's witness from God *is in man*, therefore it may be wrongly read, it may be checked, it may for a time be kept down, and prevented from showing itself to be what it is.

And the practical conclusion that comes from all this, is just the simple advice to you all: Do not wonder, in the first place, if that evidence of which we speak, vary and change in its clearness and force in your own hearts. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." Do not think that it cannot be genuine, because it is changeful. There is a sun in the heavens, but there are heavenly lights too that wax and wane; they *are* lights, they *are* in the heavens though they change. You have no reason, Christian man, to be discouraged, cast down, still less despondent, because you find that the witness of the Spirit changes and varies in your heart. Do not despond because it does. Watch it, and guard it, *lest it do*. Live in the contemplation of the Person and the fact that calls it forth, *that it may not*. You will never "brighten your evidences" by polishing at them. To polish the mirror ever so assiduously does not secure the image of the sun on its surface. The only way to do that is to carry the poor bit of glass out into the sunshine. It will shine then, never fear. It is weary work to labour at self-improvement with the hope of drawing from our own characters evidences that we are the sons of God. To have the heart filled with the light of Christ's love to us is the only way to have the whole being full of light. If you would have clear and

irrefragable, for a perpetual joy, a glory and a defence, the unwavering confidence, "I am thy child," go to God's throne, and lie down at the foot of it, and let the first thought be, "My Father in heaven," and *that* will brighten, that will stablish, that will make omnipotent in your life, the witness of the Spirit that you are the children of God.

SONS AND HEIRS.

ROMANS viii. 17.

If children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.

GOD himself is His greatest gift. The loftiest blessing which we can receive is that we should be heirs, possessors of God. There is a sublime and wonderful mutual possession of which Scripture speaks much wherein the Lord is the inheritance of Israel, and Israel is the inheritance of the Lord. "The Lord hath taken you to be to Him a people of inheritance," says Moses. "Ye are a people for a possession," says Peter. And, on the other hand, "the Lord is the portion of my inheritance," says David. "Ye are heirs of God," echoes Paul. On earth and in heaven the "heritage of the children of the Lord" is God himself, inasmuch as He is with them for their delight, in them to make them "partakers of a Divine nature," and for them in all His attributes and actions.

This being clearly understood at the outset, we shall be prepared to follow the Apostle's course of thought while he points out the conditions upon which the posses-

sion of that inheritance depends. It is children of God who are heirs of God. It is by union with Christ Jesus, the Son, to whom the inheritance belongs, that they who believe on His name receive power to become the sons of God, and with that power the possession of the inheritance. Thus, then, in this condensed utterance of the text there appear a series of thoughts which may perhaps be more fully unfolded in some such manner as the following, that there is no inheritance without sonship, that there is no sonship without a spiritual birth, that there is no spiritual birth without Christ, and that there is no Christ for us without faith.

First, then, the text tells us, NO INHERITANCE WITHOUT SONSHIP. In general terms, Spiritual blessings can only be given to those who are in a certain spiritual condition. Always and necessarily the capacity or organ of reception precedes and determines the bestowment of blessings. The light falls everywhere, but only the eye drinks it in. The lower orders of creatures are shut out from all participation in the gifts which belong to the higher forms of life, simply because they are so made and organized as that these cannot find entrance into their nature. They are, as it were, walled up all round; and the only door they have to communicate with the outer world, is the door of sense. Man has higher gifts simply because he has higher capacities. All creatures are plunged in the same boundless ocean of Divine beneficence and bestowment, and into each there flows just that, and no more, which each, by the make and constitution that God has given him, is capable of receiving. In the man there are more windows and doors knocked out than

in the animal. He is capable of receiving intellectual impulses, spiritual emotions. He can think, and feel, and desire, and will, and resolve: and so he stands on a higher level than the beast below him.

Not otherwise is it in regard to God's kingdom, "which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." The gift and blessing of salvation is primarily a spiritual gift, and only involving outward consequences secondarily and subordinately. It mainly consists in the heart being at peace with God, in the whole soul being filled with Divine affections, in the weight and bondage of transgression being taken away, and substituted by the impulse and the life of the new love. Therefore, neither God can give, nor man can receive, that gift upon any other terms, than just this, that the heart and nature be fitted and adapted for it. Spiritual blessings require a spiritual capacity for the reception of them; or, as my text says, you cannot have the inheritance unless you are sons. If salvation consisted simply in a change of place; if it were merely that by some expedient or arrangement, an outward penalty, which was to fall or not to fall at the will of an arbitrary judge, were prevented from coming down, why then, it would be open to Him who held the power of letting the sword fall, to decide on what terms He might choose to suspend its infliction. But inasmuch as God's deliverance is not a deliverance from a mere arbitrary and outward punishment: inasmuch as God's salvation, though it be deliverance from the penalty as well as from the guilt of sin, is by no means chiefly a deliverance from outward consequences, but a removal of the nature and disposition that makes these outward con-

sequences certain,—therefore a man cannot be saved, God's love cannot save him, God's justice will not save him, God's power stands back from saving him, upon any other condition than this, that his soul shall be adapted and prepared for the reception and enjoyment of the blessing of a spiritual salvation.

But the inheritance which my text speaks about, is also that which a Christian hopes to receive and enter upon in heaven. The same principle precisely applies there. There is no inheritance of heaven without sonship; because all the blessings of that future life are of a spiritual character. The joy, and the rapture, and the glory of that higher and better life, has, of course, connected with it certain changes of bodily form, certain changes of local dwelling, certain changes which could perhaps be granted equally to a man, of whatever sort he was. But, friends, it is not the golden harps, not the pavement of "glass mingled with fire," not the cessation from work, not the still composure and changeless indwelling, not the society even, that makes the heaven of heaven. All these are but the embodiments and rendering visible of the inward thing, a soul at peace with God in the depths of its being, an eye which gazes upon the Father, and a heart which wraps itself in His arms. Heaven is no heaven except in so far as it is the possession of God. That saying of the Psalmist is not an exaggeration, nor even a forgetting of the other elements of future blessedness, but it is a simple statement of the literal fact of the case, "I have none in heaven but Thee!" God is the heritage of His people. To dwell in His love, and to be filled with His light, and to walk for ever in the glory of

His sunlit face, to do His will, and to bear His character stamped upon our foreheads,—*that* is the glory and the perfectness to which we are aspiring. Do not then rest in the symbols that show us, darkly and far-off, what that future glory is. Do not forget that the picture is a shadow. Get beneath all these figurative expressions, and feel that whilst it may be true that for us in our present earthly state, there can be no higher, no purer, no more spiritual nor any truer representations of the blessedness which is to come, than those which couch it in the forms of earthly experience, and appeal to sense as the minister of delight,—yet that all these things are *re*presentations, and not adequate presentations. The inheritance of the servants of the Lord is the Lord himself, and they dwell in Him, and *there* is their joy.

Well then, if that be even partially true—admitting all that you may say about circumstances which go to make some portion of the blessedness of that future life—if it be true that God is the true blessing given by His Gospel upon earth, that He Himself is the greatest gift that can be bestowed, and that He is the true Heaven of heaven, —what a flood of light does it cast upon that statement of my text, "If children, then heirs;" no inheritance without sonship! For who can possess God but they who love Him? who can love, but they who know His love? who can have Him working in their hearts a blessed and sanctifying change, except the souls that lie thankfully quiet beneath the forming touch of His invisible hand, and like flowers drink in the light of His face in their still joy? How can God dwell in any heart except a heart which has in it a love of purity? Where can He make

His temple except in the upright heart and pure? How can there be fellowship betwixt Him and any one except the man who is a son because he hath received of the Divine nature, and in whom that Divine nature is growing up into a Divine likeness? "What fellowship hath Christ with Belial?" is not only applicable as a guide for our practical life, but points to the principle on which God's inheritance belongs to God's sons alone. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;" and those only who love, and are children, to them alone does the Father come and does the Father belong.

So much, then, for the first principle: No inheritance without sonship.

Secondly, the text leads us to the principle that there is NO SONSHIP WITHOUT A SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

The Apostle John in that most wonderful preface to his Gospel, where all deepest truths concerning the eternal Being in itself and in the solemn march of His progressive revelations to the world are set forth in language simple like the words of a child, inexhaustible like the voice of a god, draws a broad distinction between the relation to the manifestations of God which every human soul by virtue of his humanity sustains, and that which some, by virtue of their faith, enter into. Every man is lighted by the true light because he is a man. They who believe in His name receive from Him the prerogative to become the sons of God. Whatever else may be taught in John's words, surely they do teach us this, that the sonship of which he speaks does not belong to man as man, is not a relation into which we are born by natural birth, that we *become* sons after we *are* men, that those

who become sons are not co-extensive with those who are lighted by the Light, but consist of so many of that greater number as receive Him, and that such become sons by a Divine act, the communication of a spiritual life, whereby we are born of God.

The same Apostle, in his Epistles, where the widest love is conjoined with the most firmly-drawn lines of moral demarcation between the great opposites—life, light, love—death, darkness, hate—contrasts in the most unmistakeable antithesis the sons of God who are known for such because they do righteousness, and the world which knew not Christ, nor knows those who, dimly beholding, partially resemble Him. Nay, he goes further, and says in strange contradiction to the popular estimate of His character, but in true imitation of that incarnate love which hated iniquity, "In this the children of God are manifested and the children of the devil"—echoing thus the words of Him whose pitying tenderness had sometimes to clothe itself in sharpest words, even as His hand of powerful love had once to grasp the scourge of small cords. "If God were your Father, ye would love me: ye are of your father, the devil."

These are but specimens of a whole cycle of Scripture statements which in every form of necessary implication, and of direct statement, set forth the principle that he who is born again of the Spirit, and he only, is a son of God.

Nothing in all this contradicts the belief that all men are the children of God inasmuch as they are shaped by His divine hand and He has breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. They who hold that sonship is obtained on the condition which these passages seem to

assert, do also rejoice to believe and to preach that the Father's love broods over every human heart as the dove-like Spirit over the primeval chaos. They rejoice to proclaim that Christ has come that all, that each may receive the adoption of sons. They do not feel that their message to, nor their hope for the world is less blessed, less wide, because while they call on all to come and take the things that are freely given to them of God, they believe that those only who do come and take possess the blessing. Every man may become a son and heir of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

But notwithstanding all the mercies that belong to us all, notwithstanding the Divine beneficence, which, like the air and the light, pervades all nature, and underlies all our lives, notwithstanding the universal adaptation and intention of Christ's work, notwithstanding the wooing of His tender voice and the unceasing beckoning of His love, it still remains true that there are men in the world, created by God, loved and cared for by Him, for whom Christ died, who might be, but are not, sons of God.

Fatherhood! what does that word itself teach us? It speaks of the *communication of a life*, and the reciprocity of love. It rests upon a Divine act, and it involves a human emotion. It involves that the Father and the child shall have kindred life—the Father bestowing and the child possessing a life which is derived; and because derived, kindred; and because kindred, unfolding itself in likeness to the Father that gave it. And it requires that between the Father's heart and the child's heart there shall pass, in blessed interchange and quick corre-

spondence, answering love, flashing backwards and for wards, like the lightning that touches the earth and rises from it again. A simple appeal to your own consciousness will decide if that be the condition of all men. Are you, my brother, conscious of anything within you higher than the common life that belongs to you because you are an immortal soul? Can you say, "From God's hand I have received the granting and implantation of a new and better life?" Is your claim verified by this, that you are kindred with God in holy affections, in like purposes, loving what He loves, hating what He hates, doing what He wills, accepting what He sends, longing for Himself, and blessed in His presence? Is your sonship proved by the depth and sincerity, the simplicity and power, of your throbbing heart of love to your Father in heaven? Or are all these emotions empty words to you, things that are spoken in pulpits, but to which you have nothing in your life corresponding? Oh then, my friend, what am I to say to you? What but this? No sonship except by that spiritual birth; and if not such sonship, then the spirit of bondage. If not such sonship, why then, by all the tendencies of your nature, and by all the affinities of your moral being, if you are not holding of heaven, you are holding of hell; if you are not drawing your life, your character, your emotions, your affections, from the sacred well that lies up yonder, you are drawing them from the black one that lies down there. There are heaven, hell, and the earth that lies between, ever influenced either from above or from below. You are sons because born again, or slaves and "enemies by wicked works." It is a grim alternative, but it is a fact.

Thirdly, NO SPIRITUAL BIRTH WITHOUT CHRIST. We have seen that the sonship which gives power of possessing the inheritance and which comes by spiritual birth, rests upon the giving of life, spiritual life, from God; and unfolds itself in certain holy characters, and affections, and desires, the throbbing of the whole soul in full accord and harmony with the Divine character and will. Well then, it looks very clear that a man cannot make that new life for himself, cannot do it because of the habit of sin, and cannot do it because of the guilt and punishment of sin. If for sonship there must be a birth again, why, surely, the very symbol might convince you that such a process does not lie within our own power. There must come down a Divine leaven into the mass of human nature, before this new being can be evolved in any one. There must be a gift of God. A Divine energy must be the source and fountain of all holy and of all Godlike life. Christ comes, comes to make you and me live again as we never lived before; live possessors of God's love; live tenanted and ruled by a Divine Spirit; live with affections in our hearts which *we* never could kindle there; live with purposes in our souls which *we* never could put there. And I want to urge this thought, that the centre point of the Gospel is this regeneration; because if we understand, as we are too much disposed to do, that the Gospel simply comes to make men live better, to work out a moral reformation,—why, there is no need for a Gospel at all. If the change were a simple change of habit and action on the part of men, we could do without a Christ. If the change simply involved a bracing ourselves up to behave better

for the future, we could manage somehow or other about as well as or better than we have managed in the past. But if redemption be the giving of life from God; and if redemption be the change of position in reference to God's love and God's law as well, neither of these two changes can a man effect for himself. You cannot gather up the spilt water; you cannot any more gather up and re-issue the past life. The sin remains, the guilt remains. The inevitable law of God will go on its crashing way in spite of all penitence, in spite of all reformation, in spite of all desires after newness of life. There is but one Being that can make a change in our position in regard to God, and there is but one Being that can make the change by which man shall become a "new creature." The Creative Spirit that shaped the earth must shape its new being in my soul; and the Father against whose law I have offended, whose love I have slighted, whom I have turned away from, must effect the alteration that I can never effect—the alteration in my position to His judgments and justice, and to the whole sweep of His government. No new birth without Christ; no escape from the old standing-place, "enemies to God by wicked works," by anything that we can do: no hope of the inheritance unless the Lord and the Man, the "second Adam from heaven," have come! And He *has* come, and He has "dwelt with us," and He has worn this life of ours, and He has walked in the midst of this world, and He knows all about our human condition, and He has effected an actual change in the possible aspect of the Divine justice and government to us; and He has carried in the golden urn of His humanity a new spirit

and a new life which He has set down in the midst of the race; and the urn was broken on the cross of Calvary, and the water flowed out, and whithersoever that water comes there is life, and whithersoever it comes not there is death!

Last of all, NO CHRIST WITHOUT FAITH. It is not enough, brethren, that we should go through all these previous steps, if we then go utterly astray at the end, by forgetting that there is only one way by which we become partakers of any of the benefits and blessings that Christ has wrought out. It is much to say that for inheritance there must be sonship. It is much to say that for sonship there must be a Divine regeneration. It is much to say that the power of this regeneration is all gathered together in Christ Jesus. But there are plenty of people that would agree to all that, who go off at that point, and content themselves with *this* kind of thinking—that in some vague mysterious way, they know not how, in a sort of half-magical manner, the benefit of Christ's death and work comes to all in Christian lands, whether there be an act of faith or not! Now I am not going to talk theology at present, at this stage of my sermon; but what I want to leave upon all your hearts is this profound conviction,—Unless we are wedded to Jesus Christ by the simple act of trust in His mercy and His power, Christ is *nothing to us*. Do not let us, my friends, blink that deciding test of the whole matter. We may talk about Christ for ever; we may set forth aspects of His work great and glorious. He may be to us much that is very precious; but the one question, the question of questions, on which everything else depends, is, Am

I trusting to Him as my Divine Redeemer? am I resting in Him as the Son of God? Oh, I know that there are some of you here now who have a sort of nominal connexion with Christ, who have a kind of imaginative connexion with Him; traditional, ceremonial, by habit of thought, by attendance on public worship, and by I know not what other means. Ceremonies are nothing, notions are nothing, beliefs are nothing, formal participation in worship is nothing. Christ is everything to him that trusts Him. Christ is nothing but a judge and a condemnation to him that trusts Him not. And here is the turning-point, Am I resting upon that Lord for my salvation? If so, you can begin upon that step, the low one on which you can put your foot, the humble act of faith, and with the foot there, can climb up. If faith, then new birth; if new birth, then sonship; if sonship, then "an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ." But if you have not got your foot upon the lowest round of the ladder, you will never come within sight of the blessed face of Him who stands at the top of it, and who looks down to you at this moment, saying to you, "My child, *wilt* thou not cry unto Me 'Abba, Father?'"

SUFFERING WITH CHRIST, A CONDITION OF GLORY WITH CHRIST.

ROMANS viii. 17.

Joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.

IN the former part of this verse the Apostle tells us that in order to be heirs of God we must become sons through and joint-heirs with Christ. He seems at first sight to add in these words of our text another condition to those already specified, namely, that of suffering with Christ.

Now, of course, whatever may be the operation of suffering in fitting for the possession of the Christian inheritance, either here or in another world, the sonship and the sorrows do not stand on the same level in regard to it. The one is the indispensable condition of all; the other is but a means for the operation of the condition. The one,—being sons, "joint-heirs with Christ," is the root of the whole matter; the other,—the "suffering with Him," is but the various process by which from the root there come "the blade, and the ear, and the full corn in the ear." Given, the sonship,—if it is to be

worked out into power and beauty, there must be suffering with Christ. But unless there be sonship, there is no possibility of inheriting God; discipline and suffering will be of no use at all.

The chief lesson which I wish to gather from this text now is that all God's sons must suffer with Christ, and in addition to this principle, we may complete our considerations by adding briefly, that the inheritance must be won by suffering, and that if we suffer with Him, we certainly shall receive the inheritance.

First, then, SONSHIP WITH CHRIST NECESSARILY INVOLVES SUFFERING WITH HIM. I think that we entirely misapprehend the force of this passage before us, if we suppose it to refer principally or merely to the outward calamities, what you call trials and afflictions, which befal people; and see in it only the teaching, that the sorrows of daily life may have in them a sign of our being children of God, and some power to prepare us for the glory that is to come. There is a great deal more in the thought than that, brethren. This is not merely a text for people that are in affliction, but for all of us. It does not merely contain a law for a certain part of life, but it contains a law for the whole of life. It is not merely a promise that "in all our afflictions Christ shall be afflicted," but it is a solemn injunction that we seek to know "the fellowship of His sufferings, and be made conformable to the image of His death," if we expect to be "found in the likeness of His resurrection," and to have any share in the community of His glory. In other words, the foundation of it is not that Christ shares in our sufferings; but that we, as Christians, in a deep and

real sense do necessarily share and participate in Christ's. We "suffer with Him;" *not*, He suffers with us.

Now, do not let us misunderstand each other, or the Apostle's teaching. Do not suppose that I am forgetting, or wishing you to account as of small importance, the awful sense in which Christ's suffering stands as a thing by itself and unapproachable, a solitary pillar rising up, above the waste of time, to which all men everywhere are to turn with the one thought, "I can do nothing like that; I need to do nothing like it; it has been done once, and once for all; and what I have to do is, simply to lie down before Him, and let the power and the blessings of that death and those sufferings flow into my heart." The Divine Redeemer makes eternal redemption. The sufferings of Christ—the sufferings of His life, and the sufferings of His death—both because of the nature which bore them, and of the aspect which they wore in regard to us, are in their source, in their intensity, in their character, and consequences, unapproachable, incapable of repetition, and needing no repetition whilst the world shall stand. But then, do not let us forget that the very books and writers in the New Testament that preach most broadly Christ's sole, all-sufficient, eternal redemption for the world, by His sufferings and death, turn round and say to us too, "'Be planted together in the likeness of His death:' you are 'crucified to the world' by the cross of Christ; you are to 'fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ.'" He Himself speaks of our drinking of the cup that He drank of, and being baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with, if we desire to sit yonder on His throne, and share with

Him in His glory. Now what do the Apostles, and what does Christ himself, in that passage that I have quoted, mean, by such solemn words as these? Some people shrink from them, and say that it is trenching upon the central doctrines of the Gospel, when we speak about drinking of the cup which Christ drank of. They ask, Can it be? Yes, it can be, if you will think thus:—If a Christian has the spirit and life of Christ in him, his career will be moulded, imperfectly but really, by the same spirit that dwelt in his Lord; and similar causes will produce corresponding effects. The life of Christ which—Divine, pure, incapable of copy and repetition—in one aspect has passed away for ever from men, remains to be lived, in another view of it, by every Christian, who in like manner has to fight with the world, who in like manner has to resist temptation, who in like manner has to stand, by God's help, pure and sinless, in so far as the new nature of him is concerned, in the midst of a world that is full of evil. For were the sufferings of the Lord only the sufferings that were wrought upon Calvary? Were the sufferings of the Lord only the sufferings which came from the "contradiction of sinners against Himself"? Were the sufferings of the Lord only the sufferings which were connected with the bodily afflictions and pain, precious and priceless as they were, and operative causes of our redemption as they were? Oh no. Conceive of that perfect, sinless, really human life, in the midst of a system of things that is all full of corruption and of sin; coming ever and anon against misery, and wrong-doing, and rebellion; and ask yourselves whether part of His sufferings did not spring from the contact of

the sinless Son of man with a sinful world, and the apparently vain attempt to influence and leaven that sinful world with care for itself and love for the Father. If there had been nothing more than that, yet Christ's sufferings as the Son of God in the midst of sinful men would have been deep and real. "Oh faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" was wrung from Him by the painful sense of want of sympathy between His aims and theirs. "Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then I would fly away and be at rest," must often be the language of those who are like Him in spirit, and in consequent sufferings.

And then again, another branch of the "sufferings of Christ" is to be found in that deep and mysterious fact on which I durst not venture to speak beyond what the actual words of Scripture put into my lips—the fact that Christ wrought out His perfect obedience as a man, *through temptation and by suffering.* There was no sin *within* Him, no tendency to sin, no yielding to the evil that assailed. "The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." But yet, when that dark Power stood by His side, and said, "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down," it was a real temptation and not a sham one. No wish to do it, no faltering for a moment, no hesitation. There was no rising up in that calm will, of even a moment's impulse to do the thing that was presented;—but yet it was presented, and, when Christ triumphed, and the tempter departed for a season, there had been a temptation and there had been a conflict. And though obedience be a joy, and the doing of His Father's will was His delight, as it must needs be in

pure and in purified hearts; yet obedience which is sustained in the face of temptation, and which never fails, though its path lead to bodily pains, and the "contradiction of sinners," may well be called suffering. We cannot speak of our Lord's obedience as the surrender of His own will to the Father's, with the implication that these two wills ever did or could move except in harmony. There was no place in Christ's obedience for that casting out of sinful self, which makes our submission a surrender joined with suffering. But He knew temptation. Flesh, and sense, and the world, and the prince of the world presented it to Him; and therefore His obedience too was suffering, even though to do the will of His Father were His meat, and His drink, His sustenance, and His refreshment.

But then, let me remind you still further, that not only does the life of Christ, as sinless in the midst of sinful men; and the life of Christ, as sinless whilst yet there was temptation presented to it—assume the aspect of being a life of suffering, and become, in that respect, the model for us; but that also the death of Christ, besides its aspect as an atonement and sacrifice for sin, the power by which transgression is put away, and God's love flows out upon our souls, has another power given to it in the teaching of the New Testament. The death of Christ is a type of the Christian's life, which is to be one long—protracted and daily dying to sin, to self, to the world. The crucifixion of the old manhood is to be the life's work of every Christian, through the power of faith in that cross by which "the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

That thought comes over and over again in all forms of earnest presentation in the Apostle's teaching. Do not slur it over as if it were a mere fanciful metaphor. It carries in its type a most solemn reality. The truth is, that, if a Christian, you have a double life. There is Christ, with His power, with His Spirit, giving you a nature which is pure and sinless, incapable of transgression, like His own. The new man, that which is born of God, sinneth not, cannot sin. But side by side with it, working through it, working in it, leavening it, indistinguishable from it to your consciousness, by anything but this, that the one works righteousness, and the other works transgression—there is the "old man," "the flesh," "the old Adam," your own godless, independent, selfish, proud being. And the one is to slay the other! Ah, let me tell you, these words—crucifying, casting out the old man, plucking out the right eye, maiming self of the right hand, mortifying the deeds of the body,—they are something very much deeper and more awful than poetical symbols and metaphors. They teach us this —there is no growth without sore sorrow. Conflict not Progress is the word that defines man's path from darkness into light. No holiness is won by any other means than this, that wickedness should be *slain* day by day, and hour by hour. In long lingering agony often, with the blood of the heart pouring out at every quivering vein, you are to cut right through the life and being of that sinful self; to do what the Word does, pierce to the dividing asunder of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and get rid by crucifying and slaying—a long process, a painful process—of your own sinful self. And not until

you can stand up, and say, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," have you accomplished that to which you are consecrated and vowed by your sonship—"being conformed unto the likeness of His death," and "knowing the fellowship of His sufferings."

It is this process, the inward strife and conflict in getting rid of evil, which the Apostle designates here with the name of "suffering with Christ, that we may be also glorified together." On this high level and not upon the lower one of the consideration that Christ will help us to bear outward infirmities and afflictions, do we find the true meaning of all that Scripture teaching that says indeed, "Yes, our sufferings are *His;*" but lays the foundation of it in this, "His sufferings are *ours.*" It begins by telling us that Christ has done a work and borne a sorrow that no second can ever do. Then it tells us that Christ's life of obedience—which, because it *was* a life of obedience, was a life of suffering, and brought Him into a condition of hostility to the men around Him—is to be repeated in us. It sets before us the cross of Calvary, and the sorrows and pains that were felt there;—and it says to us, Christian men and women, if you want the power for holy living, have fellowship in that atoning death; and if you want the pattern of holy living, look at that cross and feel, "I am crucified to the world by it; and, the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."

Such considerations as these, however, do not necessarily exclude the other one (which we may just mention and dwell on for a moment), namely, that where there is this spiritual participation in the sufferings of Christ,

and where His death is reproduced and perpetuated, as it were, in our daily mortifying ourselves in the present evil world,—there *Christ is with us in our afflictions.* God forbid that I should try to strike away any word of consolation that has come, as these words of my text have come, to so many sorrowing hearts in all generations, like music in the night and like cold waters to a thirsty soul. We need not hold that there is no reference here to that comforting thought, "In all our affliction He is afflicted." Brethren, you and I have, each of us—one in one way, and one in another, all in some way, all in the right way, none in too severe a way, none in too slight a way—to tread in the path of sorrow; and is it not a blessed thing, as we go along through that dark valley of the shadow of death down into which the sunniest paths go sometimes, to come, amidst the twilight and the gathering clouds, upon tokens that Jesus has been on the road before us? They tell us that in some trackless lands, when one friend passes through the pathless forests, he breaks a twig ever and anon as he goes, that those who come after may see the traces of his having been there, and may know that they are not out of the road. Oh, when we are journeying through the murky night, and the dark woods of affliction and sorrow, it is something to find here and there a spray broken, or a leafy stem bent down with the tread of His foot and the brush of His hand as He passed; and to remember that the path He trod He has hallowed, and thus to find lingering fragrances and hidden strengths in the remembrance of Him as "in all points tempted like as we are," bearing grief *for* us, bearing grief *with* us, bearing grief *like* us.

Oh do not, do not, my brethren, keep these sacred thoughts of Christ's companionship in sorrow, for the larger trials of life. If the mote in the eye be large enough to annoy you, it is large enough to bring out His sympathy; and if the grief be too small for Him to compassionate and share, it is too small for you to be troubled by it. If you are ashamed to apply that Divine thought, "Christ bears this grief with me," to those petty molehills that you magnify into mountains sometimes, think to yourselves that then it is a shame for you to be stumbling over them. But on the other hand, never fear to be irreverent or too familiar in the thought, that Christ is willing to bear and help me to bear, the pettiest, the minutest, and most insignificant of the daily annoyances that may come to ruffle me. Whether it be a poison from one serpent sting, or whether it be poison from a million of buzzing tiny mosquitoes; if there be a smart, go to Him, and He will help you to bear it. He will do more, He will bear it with you, for if so be that we suffer with Him, He suffers with us, and our oneness with Christ brings about a community of possessions whereby it becomes true of each trusting soul in its relations to Him, that "all mine (joys and sorrows alike) are thine, and all thine are mine."

There remain some other considerations which may be briefly stated, in order to complete the lessons of this text. In the second place, THIS COMMUNITY OF SUFFERING IS A NECESSARY PREPARATION FOR THE COMMUNITY OF GLORY.

I name this principally for the sake of putting in a caution. The Apostle does not mean to tell us, of

course, that if there were such a case as that of a man becoming a son of God, and having no occasion or opportunity afterwards, by brevity of life or other causes, for passing through the discipline of sorrow, his inheritance would be forfeited. We must always take such passages as this,—which seem to make the discipline of the world an essential part of the preparing of us for glory—in conjunction with the other undeniable truth which completes them, that when a man has the love of God in his heart, however feebly, however newly, there and then he is fit for the inheritance. I think that Christian people make vast mistakes sometimes in talking about "being made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," about being "ripe for glory," and the like. One thing at any rate is very certain, it is not the discipline that fits. That which fits goes before the discipline, and the discipline only develops the fitness. "God *hath made* us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," says the Apostle. That is a past act. The preparedness for heaven comes at the moment,—if it be a momentary act,—when a man turns to Christ. You may take the lowest and most abandoned form of human character, and in one moment (it is possible, and it is often the case) the entrance into that soul of the feeble germ of that new affection, shall at once change the whole moral habitude of that man. Though it *be* true, then, that heaven is only open to those who are capable, —by holy aspirations and Divine desires,—of entering into it, it is equally true that such aspirations and desires may be the work of an instant, and may be superinduced in a moment in a heart the most debased and the most

degraded. "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise," —*fit* for the inheritance!

And, therefore, let us not misunderstand such words as this text, and fancy that the necessary discipline, which we have to go through before we are ready for heaven, is necessary in anything like the same sense in which it is necessary that a man should have faith in Christ in order to be saved. The one may be dispensed with, the other cannot. A Christian at any period of his Christian experience, if it please God to take him, is fit for the kingdom. The life *is* life, whether it be the budding beauty and feebleness of childhood, or the strength of manhood, or the maturity and calm peace of old age. But "add to your faith," that "an entrance may be ministered unto you *abundantly*." Remember that though the root of the matter, the seed of the kingdom, may be in you; and that though, therefore, you have a right to feel that, at any period of your Christian experience, if it please God to take you out of this world, you are fit for heaven,—yet in His mercy He is leaving you here, training you, disciplining you, cleansing you, making you to be polished shafts in His quiver; and that all the glowing furnaces of fiery trial and all the cold waters of affliction, are but the preparation through which the rough iron is to be passed before it becomes tempered steel, a shaft in the Master's hand. And so learn to look upon all trial as being at once the seal of your sonship, and the means by which God puts it within your power to win a higher place, a loftier throne, a nobler crown, a closer fellowship with Him "who hath suffered, being tempted," and who will receive into His own blessedness

and rest them that are tempted. "The child, though he be an heir, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors." God puts us to the school of sorrow under that stern tutor and governor here, and gives us the opportunity of "suffering with Christ," that by the daily crucifixion of our old nature, by the lessons and blessings of outward calamities and change, there may grow up in us a still nobler and purer, and perfecter Divine life; and that we may so be made capable—more capable, and capable of more—of that inheritance for which the only necessary thing is the death of Christ, and the only fitness is faith in His name.

Finally, THAT INHERITANCE IS THE NECESSARY RESULT OF THE SUFFERING that has gone before. The suffering results from our union with Christ. That union must needs culminate in glory. It is not only because the joy hereafter seems required in order to vindicate God's love to His children, who here reap sorrow from their sonship, that the discipline of life cannot but end in blessedness. *That* ground of mere compensation is a low one on which to rest the certainty of future bliss. But the inheritance is sure to all who here suffer with Christ, because the one cause—union with the Lord—produces both the present result of fellowship in His sorrows, and the future result of joy in His joy, of possession in His possessions. The inheritance is sure because Christ possesses it now. The inheritance is sure because earth's sorrows not merely require to be repaid by its peace, but because they have an evident design to fit us for it, and it would be destructive to all faith in

God's wisdom, and God's knowledge of His own purposes, not to believe, that what He has wrought for us will be given to us. Trials have no meaning, unless they are means to an end. The end is the inheritance—and sorrows here, as well as the Spirit's work here, are the earnest of the inheritance. Measure the greatness of the glory by what has preceded it. God takes all these years of life, and all the sore trials and afflictions that belong inevitably to an earthly career and works them in, into the blessedness that *shall* come. If a fair measure of the greatness of any result of productive power be the length of time that was taken for getting it ready, we can dimly conceive what that joy must be for which seventy years of strife, and pain, and sorrow, are but a momentary preparation; and what must be the weight of that glory which is the counterpoise and consequence to the afflictions of this lower world. The further the pendulum swings on the one side, the further it goes up on the other. The deeper God plunges the comet into the darkness, out yonder, the closer does it come to the sun at its nearest distance, and the longer does it stand basking and glowing in the full blaze of the glory from the central orb. So in *our* revolution, the measure of the distance from the farthest point of our darkest earthly sorrow, *to* the throne, may help us to the measure of the closeness of the bright, perfect, perpetual glory above, when we are *on* the throne: for if so be that we are sons, we *must* suffer with Him; if so be that we suffer, we *must* be glorified together!

THE LIVING DEAD.

ST. LUKE xxiv. 5, 6.

Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.

WE can never understand the utter desolation of the days that lay betwixt Christ's death and His resurrection. Our faith rests on centuries. We know that that grave was not even an interruption to the progress of His work, but was the straight road to His triumph and His glory. We know that it was the completion of the work of which the raising of the widow's son and of Lazarus were but the beginnings. But these disciples did not know that. To them the inferior miracles by which He had redeemed others from the power of the grave, must have made His own captivity to it all the more stunning; and the thought which such miracles ending *so* must have left upon them, must have been something like, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." And therefore we can never think ourselves fully back to that burst of strange, sudden thankfulness with which these weeping Marys found those two calm angel forms sitting with folded wings, like the

cherubim over the mercy-seat, but overshadowing a better propitiation, and heard the words of my text, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen."

But yet, although the words before us, in the full depth and preciousness of their meaning, of course could only be *once* fulfilled, we may not only gather from them thoughts concerning that one death and resurrection, but we may likewise apply them, in a very permissible modification of meaning, to the present condition of all who have departed in His faith and fear; since for us, too, it is true that, whenever we go to an open grave, sorrowing for those that we love, or oppressed with the burden of mortality in any shape, if our eyes are anointed, we can see there sitting the quiet angel forms; and if our ears be purged from the noise of earth, we can hear them saying to us, in regard to all that have gone away, "Why seek ye the living in these graves? They are not here; they are risen, as He said." The thoughts are very old, brethren. God be thanked they *are* old! Perhaps to some of you they may come now with new power, because they come with new application to your own present condition. Perhaps to some of you they may sound very weak, and "words weaker than your grief will make grief more;"—but such as they are, let us look at them for a moment or two together this morning.

The first thought, then, that these words of the angel messengers, and the scene in which we find them, suggest, is this: THE DEAD ARE THE LIVING. Language, which is more accustomed and adapted to express the appearances than the realities of things, leads us astray very much

when we use the phrase "the dead" as if it expressed the continuance of the condition into which men pass in the act of dissolution. It misleads us no less, when we use it as if it expressed in itself the whole truth even as to that act of dissolution. "The dead" and "the living" are not names of two classes which exclude each other. Much rather, there are *none* who *are dead*. The dead are the living who have died. Whilst they were dying they lived, and after they were dead they lived more fully. All live unto God. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Oh, how solemnly sometimes that thought comes up before us, that all those past generations which have stormed across this earth of ours, and then have fallen into still forgetfulness, live yet. Somewhere at this very instant, they now verily *are!* We say, they *were*, they *have been*. There are no have beens! Life is life for ever. *To be* is eternal being. Every man that has died is at this instant in the full possession of all his faculties, in the intensest exercise of all his capacities, standing somewhere in God's great universe, ringed with the sense of God's presence, and feeling in every fibre of his being that life, which comes after death, is not less real, but more real, not less great, but more great, not less full or intense, but more full and intense, than the mingled life which, lived here on earth, was a centre of life surrounded with a crust and circumference of mortality. The dead are the living. They lived whilst they died; and after they die, they live on for ever!

Such a conviction has as a matter of fact been firmly grasped as an unquestionable truth and a familiar operative belief only within the sphere of the Christian revelation. From the natural point of view the whole region

of the dead is "a land of darkness, without any order, where the light is as darkness." The usual sources of human certainty fail us here. Reason is only able to stammer a peradventure. Experience and consciousness are silent. "The simple senses" can only say that it looks as if Death were an end, the final Omega. Testimony there is none from any pale lips that have come back to unfold the secrets of the prison-house.

The history of Christ's death and resurrection, His dying words "*this day* thou shalt be with Me in Paradise," the full identity of being with which He rose from the grave, the manhood changed and yet the same, the intercourse of the forty days before His ascension, which showed the continuance of all the old love "stronger than death," and was in all essential points like His former intercourse with His disciples, though changed in form and introductory to the times when they should see Him no more in the flesh—these teach us, not as a peradventure, nor as a dim hope, nor as a strong foreboding which may be in its nature prophetic, but as a certainty based upon a historical fact, that Death's empire is partial in its range, and transitory in its duration. But, after we are once convinced of that, we can look again with new eyes even on the external accompaniments of death, and see that Sense is too hasty in its conclusion that death is the final end. There is no reason from what we see passing before our eyes then to believe, that it, with all its pitifulness and all its pain, has any power at all upon the soul. True, the Spirit gathers itself into itself; and, poising itself for its flight, becomes oblivious of what is passing round about it. True, the tenant that is about to depart from the house in which he

has dwelt so long, closes the window before he goes. But what is there in the cessation of the power of communication with an outer world—what is there in the fact that you clasp the nerveless hand, and it returns no pressure; that you whisper gentle words that you think might kindle a soul under the dull, cold ribs of death itself, and get no answer—that you look with weeping gaze to catch the response of affection from out of the poor filmy, closing, tearless eyes there, and look in vain—what is there in all that to lead to the conviction that *the spirit* is participant of that impotence and silence? Is not the soul only self-centring itself, retiring from the outposts, but not touched in the citadel? Is it not only that as the long sleep of life begins to end, and the waking eye of the soul begins to open itself on realities, the sights and sounds of the dream begin to pass away? Is it not but that the man, in dying, begins to be what he fully is when he *is* dead, "dead unto sin," dead unto the world, that he may "live unto God," that he may live with God, that he may live really? And so we can look upon that ending of life, and say, "it is a very small thing; it only cuts off the fringes of my life, it does not touch *me* at all." It only plays round about the husk, and does not get at the core. It only strips off the circumferential mortality, but the soul rises up untouched by it, and shakes the bands of death from off its immortal arms, and flutters the stain of death from off its budding wings, and rises fuller of life *because of death*, and mightier in its vitality in the very act of submitting the body to the law, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

Touching but a part of the being, and touching that but for a moment, death is no *state*, it is an *act*. It is not a *condition*, it is a *transition*. Men speak about life as "a narrow neck of land, betwixt two unbounded seas:" they had better speak about *death* as that. It is an isthmus, narrow and almost impalpable, on which, for one brief instant, the soul poises itself; whilst behind it there lies the inland lake of past being, and before it the shoreless ocean of future life, all lighted with the glory of God, and making music as it breaks even upon these dark, rough rocks. Death is but a passage. It is not a house, it is only a vestibule. The grave has a door on its inner side. We roll the stone to its mouth and come away, thinking that we have left them there till the resurrection. But when the outer access to earth is fast closed, the inner portal that opens on heaven is set wide, and God says to His child, "Come, enter into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee....until the indignation be overpast!" Death is a superficial thing, and a transitory thing—a darkness that is caused by the light, and a darkness that ends in the light—a trifle, if you measure it by duration; a trifle, if you measure it by depth. The death of the mortal is the emancipation and the life of the immortal! Then, brethren, we may go with the words of my text, and look upon every green hillock below which any that are dear to us are lying, and say to ourselves, "Not *here*—God be thanked, no—not here: living, and not dead; *yonder*, with the Master!" Oh, we think far too much of the grave, and far too little of the throne and the glory! We are far too much the creatures of sense; and the accompaniments of dissolution and departure fill up our

hearts and our eyes. Think them all away, believe them all away, love them all away. Stand in the light of Christ's life, and Christ's death, and Christ's rising, till you feel, "Thou art a shadow, not a substance—no real thing at all." Yes, a shadow; and where a shadow falls, there must be sunlight above to cast it. Look up, then, above the shadow Death, above the sin and separation from God, of which it is the shadow! Look up to the unsetting light of the Eternal Life on the throne of the universe, and see bathed in it the living dead in Christ!

God has taken them to Himself, and we ought not to think (if we would think as the Bible speaks) of death as being anything else than the transitory thing which breaks down the brazen walls and lets us into liberty. For, indeed, if you will examine the New Testament on this subject, I think you will be surprised to find how very seldom—scarcely ever—the word "death" is employed to express the mere fact of the dissolution of the connexion between soul and body. It is strange, but significant, that the Apostles, and Christ himself, so rarely use the word to express that which we exclusively mean by it. They use all manner of other expressions, as if they felt, the *fact* remains, but all that made it death has gone away. In a real sense, and all the more real because the external fact continues, Christ "hath abolished death." Two men may go down to the grave together: of one this may be the epitaph, "He that believeth in Christ shall never die;" and of the other—passing through precisely the same physical experience and appearance, the dissolution of soul and body, we may say—"There, that is death—death as God sent it, to be the punishment of man's sin."

The outward fact remains the same, the whole inner character of it is altered. As to them that believe, though they have passed through the experience of painful separation—slow, languishing, departure, or suddenly being caught up in some chariot of fire; not only are they living now, but they never died at all! Have you understood "death" in the full, pregnant sense of the expression, which means not only that *shadow*, the separation of the body from the soul; but that *reality*, the separation of the soul from life, because of the separation of the soul from God?

Then, secondly, this text, indeed the whole incident, may set before us the other consideration, SINCE THEY HAVE DIED, THEY LIVE A BETTER LIFE THAN OURS. I am not going to enter here, at any length, or very particularly, into what seem to me to be the irrefragable scriptural grounds for holding the complete, uninterrupted, and even intensified consciousness of the soul of man, in the interval between death and the resurrection. "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." "*This day* shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." These words, if there were none other, are surely enough; seeing that of all that dark region we know only what it pleases God to tell us in the Bible, and seeing that it does not please Him to give us more than hints and glimpses of any part of it. But putting aside all attempts to elaborate a full doctrine of the intermediate state from the few Scripture expressions that bear on it, I merely allege, in general terms, that the present life of departed saints is fuller and nobler than that which they possessed on earth. They are even now, whatever be the details of their condition,

"*the spirits* of just men made perfect." As yet the body is not glorified—but the *spirits* of the perfected righteous are now parts of that lofty society whose head is Christ, whose members are the angels of God, the saints on earth and the equally conscious redeemed who "sleep in Jesus."

In what particulars is their life now higher than it was? First, they have close fellowship with Christ; then, they are separated from this present body of weakness, of dishonour, of corruption; then, they are withdrawn from all the trouble, and toil, and care of this present life; and then, and not least, surely, they have death behind them, not having that awful figure standing on their horizon waiting for them to come up with it! These are some of the elements of the life of the sainted dead. What a wondrous advance on the life of earth they reveal if we think of them! They are closer to Christ; they are delivered from the body, as a source of weakness; as a hinderer of knowledge; as a dragger-down of all the aspiring tendencies of the soul; as a source of sin; as a source of pain. They are delivered from all the necessity of labour which is agony, of labour which is disproportionate to strength, of labour which often ends in disappointment, of labour which is wasted so often in mere keeping life in, of labour which at the best is a curse, though it be a merciful curse too. They are delivered from that "fear of death" which, though it be stripped of its sting, is never extinguished in any soul of man that lives; and they can smile at the way in which that narrow and inevitable passage bulked so large before them all their days, and after all, when they came to it,

was so slight and small! If these be parts of the life of them that "sleep in Jesus," if they are fuller of knowledge, fuller of wisdom, fuller of love, and capacity of love, and object of love; fuller of holiness, fuller of energy, and yet full of rest from head to foot; if all the hot tumult of earthly experience is stilled and quieted, all the fever beating of this blood of ours for ever at an end; all the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" done with for ever, and if the calm face which we looked last upon, and out of which the lines of sorrow, and pain, and sickness melted away, giving it a nobler nobleness than we had ever seen upon it in life, is only an image of the restful and more blessed being into which they have passed,—if the dead are thus, then "Blessed are the dead!"

No wonder that one aspect of that blessedness—the "*sleeping* in Jesus"—has been the one that the weary have laid hold of at all times; but do not let us forget what lies even in that figure of sleep, or distort it as if it meant to express a less vivid life than that here below. I think we sometimes misunderstand what the Bible means when it speaks about death as a sleep, by taking it to express the idea that that intermediate state is one of a kind of depressed consciousness, and of a less full vitality than the present. Not so. Sleep is *rest*, that is one reason for the scriptural application of the word to death. Sleep is the cessation of all connexion with the external world, that is another reason. As we play with the names of those that are familiar to us, so a loving faith can venture to play, as it were, with the awful name of him who is King of Terrors, and to minimise it down

to that shadow and reflection of itself which we find in the nightly act of going to rest. That may be another reason. But sleep is not unconsciousness, sleep does not touch the spirit. Sleep sets us free from relations to the outer world; but the soul works as hard, though in a different way, when we slumber as when we wake. People who know what it is to dream, ought never to fancy that when the Bible talks about death as sleep, it means to say to us that death is unconsciousness. By no means. Strip the man of the disturbance that comes from a fevered body, and he will have a calmer soul. Strip him of the hindrances that come from a body which is like an opaque tower around his spirit, with only a narrow slit here and a narrow door there—five poor senses, with which he can come into connexion with an outer universe: and, then surely, the spirit will have wider avenues out to God, and larger powers of reception, because it has lost the earthly tabernacle which, just in proportion as it brought the spirit into connexion with the earth to which the tabernacle belongs, severed its connexion with the heavens that are above. They who have died in Christ live a fuller and a nobler life, by the very dropping away of the body; a fuller and a nobler life, by the very cessation of care, change, strife and struggle; and, above all, a fuller and nobler life, because they "sleep *in Jesus*," and are gathered into His bosom, and wake with Him yonder beneath the altar, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands, "waiting the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body." For though death be a *progress*—a progress to the spiritual existence; though death be

a birth to a higher and nobler state; though it be the gate of life, fuller and better than any which we possess; though the present state of the departed in Christ is a state of calm blessedness, a state of perfect communion, a state of rest and satisfaction;—yet it is not the final and perfect state, either.

And, therefore, in the last place, THE BETTER LIFE, WHICH THE DEAD IN CHRIST ARE LIVING NOW, LEADS ON TO A STILL FULLER LIFE when they get back their glorified bodies. The perfection of man is, body, soul, and spirit. That is man, as God made him. The spirit perfected, the soul perfected, *without* the bodily life, is but part of the whole. For the future world, in all its glory, we have the firm basis laid that it, too, is to be in a real sense a material world, where men once more are to possess bodies as they did before, only bodies through which the spirit shall work conscious of no disproportion, bodies which shall be fit servants and adequate organs of the immortal souls within, bodies which shall never break down, bodies which shall never hem in nor refuse to obey the spirits that dwell in them, but which shall add to their power, and deepen their blessedness, and draw them closer to the God whom they serve and the Christ after the likeness of whose glorious body they are fashioned and conformed. "Body, soul, and spirit,"—the old combination which was on earth is to be the perfect humanity of heaven. The spirits that are perfected, that are living in blessedness, that are dwelling in God, that are sleeping in Christ, at this moment are waiting, stretching out (I say, not longing, but) expectant hands of faith and hope; for that they would not be unclothed,

but clothed upon with their house which is from heaven, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

We have nothing to say, now and here, about what that bodily condition may be—about the differences and the identities between it and our present earthly house of this tabernacle. Only *this* we know—reverse all the weakness of flesh, and you get some faint notion of the glorious body. It is sown in corruption, dishonour and weakness. It is raised in incorruption, glory and power. Nay, more, it is sown a natural body, fit organ for the animal life or nature, which stands connected with this material universe; "it is raised a spiritual body," fit servant for the spirit that dwells in it, that works through it, that is perfected in its redemption!

Why, then, seek the living among the dead? "God giveth His beloved sleep;" and in that peaceful sleep, realities, not dreams, come round their quiet rest, and fill their conscious spirits and their happy hearts with blessedness and fellowship. And when thus lulled to sleep in the arms of Christ they have rested till it please Him to accomplish the number of His elect, then, in His own time He will make the eternal morning to dawn, and the hand that kept them in their slumber shall touch them into waking, and shall clothe them when they arise according to the body of His own glory; and they looking into His face, and flashing back its love, its light, its beauty, shall each break forth into singing as the rising light of that unsetting day touches their transfigured and immortal heads, in the triumphant thanksgiving "I am satisfied, for I awake in Thy likeness."

"Therefore, comfort one another with these words,"

and remember that *we* are of the day, not of the night; let us not, then, sleep as do others; but let us reckon that Christ hath died for us, that whether we wake on earth, or sleep in the grave, or wake in heaven, we may live together with Him!

MEMORY IN ANOTHER WORLD.

ST. LUKE xvi. 25.

Abraham said, Son, remember!

IT is a very striking thought that Christ, if He be what we suppose Him to be, knew all about the unseen present which we call the future, and yet was all but silent in reference to it. Seldom is it on His lips at all. Arguments drawn from another world He has very few of. Sometimes He speaks about it, but rather by allusion than in anything like an explicit revelation. This parable out of which my text is taken, is perhaps the most definite and continuous of His words about the invisible world; and yet all the while it lay there before Him; and standing on the very verge of it, with it spread out clear before His gaze, He reads off but a word or two of what He sees, and then shuts it in in darkness, and says to us, in the spirit of a part of this parable, You have Moses and the prophets—hear them: if these are not enough, it will not be enough for you if all the glories of heaven and all the ghastliness of hell are flashed and flaming before you. We too, if we are to "prophesy according to the proportion of faith," must not leave out altogether

references to a future life in its two departments, and such motives as may be based upon them; only, I think, we ought always to keep them in the same relative amount to the whole of our teaching in which Christ kept them.

This parable, seeing that it *is* a parable, of course cannot be trusted as if it were a piece of simple dogmatic revelation, to give us information, facts, so as to construct out of it a theory of the other world. We are always in the double danger in parables, of taking that for drapery which was meant to be essence, and taking that for essence which was meant to be drapery. And so I do not profess to read from this narrative any very definite and clear knowledge of the future; but I think that in the two words which I have ventured to take as a text, we get the basis of very impressive thoughts with regard to the functions of memory in another world.

"Son, remember!" It is the voice, the first voice, the perpetual voice, which meets every man when he steps across the threshold of earth into the presence chamber of eternity. All the future is so built upon and interwoven with the past, that for the saved and for the lost alike this word might almost be taken as the motto of their whole situation, as the explanation of their whole condition. Memory in another world is indispensable to the gladness of the glad, and strikes the deepest note in the sadness of the lost. There can be no need to dwell at any length on the simple introductory thought, that there must be memory in a future state. Unless there were remembrance, there could be no sense of individuality. A man cannot have any conviction that he is

himself, but by constant, though often unconscious, operation of this subtle act of remembrance. There can be no sense of personal identity except in proportion as there is a clearness of recollection. Then again, if that future state be a state of retribution, there must be memory. Otherwise, there might be joy, and there might be sorrow, but the why and the wherefore of either would be entirely struck out of a man's consciousness, and the one could not be felt as reward, nor the other as punishment. If, then, we are to rise from the grave the same men that we are laid in it, and if the future life has this for its characteristic, that it is a state either of recompense and reward, or of retribution and suffering, then, for both, the clearness and constant action of memory is certainly needed. But it is not to the simple fact of its existence that I want to direct your attention now. I wish, rather, to suggest to you one or two modifications under which it must apparently work in another world. When men remember *there*, they will remember very differently from the way in which they remember *here*. Let us look at these changes—constituting it, on the one hand, an instrument of torture; and, on the other, a foundation of all our gladness.

First, in another state, MEMORY WILL BE SO WIDENED AS TO TAKE IN THE WHOLE LIFE. We believe that what a man is in this life, he is more in another, that tendencies here become results yonder, that his sin, that his falsehood, that his whole moral nature, be it good or bad, becomes there what it is only striving to be here. We believe that in this present life our capacities of all sorts are hedged in, thwarted, damped down, diluted, by the

necessity which there is for their working through this material body of ours. We believe that death is the heightening of a man's stature—if he be bad, the intensifying of his badness; if he be good, the strengthening of his goodness. We believe that the contents of the intellectual nature, the capacities of that nature also, are all increased by the fact of having done with earth and having left the body behind. It is, I think, the teaching of common sense, and it is the teaching of the Bible. True, that for some, that growth will only be a growth into greater power of feeling greater sorrow. Such an one grows up into a Hercules; but it is only that the Nessus shirt may wrap round him more tightly, and may gnaw him with a fiercer agony. But whether saved or lost—he that dies is greater than when yet living; and all his powers are intensified and strengthened by that awful experience of Death and by what it brings with it.

Memory partakes in the common quickening. There are not wanting analogies and experiences in our present life to let us see that, in fact, when we talk about forgetting we ought to mean nothing more than the temporary cessation of conscious remembrance. Everything which you do leaves its effect with you for ever, just as long-forgotten meals are in your blood and bones to-day. Every act that a man performs is there. It has printed itself upon his soul, it has become a part of himself: and though, like a newly painted picture, after a little while the colours go in, why is that? Only because they have entered into the very fibre of the canvas, and have left the surface

because they are incorporated with the substance, and they want but a touch of varnish to flash out again! We forget *nothing*, in the sense of not being able, some time or another, to recall it; we forget *much* in the sense of ceasing for a time to have it in our thoughts.

For we know, in our own case, how strangely there come swimming up before us, out of the depths of the dim waters of oblivion—as one has seen some bright shell drawn from the sunless sea-caves, and gleaming white and shapeless far down before we had it on the surface—past thoughts, we know not whence or how. Some one of the million of hooks, with which all our life is furnished, has laid hold of some subtle suggestion which has been enough to bring them up into consciousness. We said we had forgotten them. What does it mean? Only that they had sunk into the deep, beneath our consciousness, and lay there to be brought up when needful. There is nothing more strange than the way in which some period of my life, that I supposed to be an entire blank—if I will think about it for a little while—begins to glimmer into form. As the developing solution brings out the image on the photographic plate, so the mind has the strange power, by fixing the attention, as we say (a short word which means a long, mysterious thing) upon that past that is half remembered and half forgotten, of bringing it into clear consciousness and perfect recollection. And, there are instances, too, of a still more striking kind, familiar to some of us—how, in what people call morbid states, men remember their childhood, which they had forgotten for long years. You may remember that old story of the dying woman begin-

ning to speak in a tongue unknown to all that stood around her bed. When a child, she had learned some northern language, in a far off land. Long before she had learned to shape any definite remembrances of the place, she had been taken away, and not having used, had forgotten the speech. But at last there rushed up again all the old memories, and the tongue of the dumb was loosed, and she spake! People would say, "the action of disease." It may be, but that explains nothing. Perhaps in such states the spirit is working in a manner less limited by the body than in health, and so showing some slight prelude of its powers when it has shuffled off this mortal coil. But be that as it may, these morbid phenomena, and the other more familiar facts already referred to, unite to show us that the sphere of recollection is much wider than that occupied at any given moment by memory. Recollection is the servant of Memory, as our great poet tells us, in his wise allegory, and

> "does on him still attend,
> To reach whenever he for ought does send."

We cannot lay aside anything that we have ever done or been so utterly but that that servant can find it and bring it to his lord. We forget nothing so completely but that we shall be able to recall it. Of that awful power we may say, without irreverence, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."

The fragmentary remembrances which we have now, lift themselves above the ocean of forgetfulness like islands in some Archipelago, the summits of sister hills,

though separated by the estranging sea that covers their converging sides and the valleys where their roots unite. The solid land is there, though hidden. Drain off the sea, and there will be no more isolated peaks, but continuous land. In this life we have but the island memories heaving themselves into sight, but in the next "the Lord" shall "cause the sea to go back" by the breath of His mouth, and the channels of the great deep of a human heart's experiences and actions shall be laid bare. "There shall be no more sea;" but the solid land of a whole life will appear when God says, "Son, remember!"

So much, then, for my first consideration—namely, that *Memory in a future state will comprehend the whole of life.* Another thing is, that MEMORY IN A FUTURE STATE WILL PROBABLY BE SO RAPID AS TO EMBRACE ALL THE PAST LIFE AT ONCE. We do not know, we have no conception of, the extent to which our thinking, and feeling, and remembrance, are made tardy by the slow vehicle of this bodily organization in which the soul rides. But we have in our own lives instances enough to make us feel that there lie in us dormant, mysterious powers by which the rapidity of all our operations of thought and feeling will be enhanced marvellously, like the difference between a broad-wheeled waggon and an express train! At some turning point of your life, when some great joy flashed, or some great shadow darkened upon you all at once; when some crisis that wanted an instantaneous decision appeared,—why, what regions of thought, purpose, plan, resolution; what wilderness of desolate sorrow, and what paradises of blooming gladness, your soul has gone through in a moment. Well, then, take another illustra-

tion: A sleeper, feeling a light finger laid upon his shoulder, does not know what it is; in an instant he awakes, and says, "Is it you?" but between that touch and that word there may be a whole life run through, a whole series of long events dreamt and felt. As on the little retina of an eye there can be painted on a scale inconceivably minute, every tree and mountain-top in the whole wide panorama,—so, in an instant, one may run through almost a whole lifetime of mental acts. Then, again, you remember that illustration, often used on this subject, about the experience of those who have been brought face to face with sudden death, and got out of it. The drowning man, when he comes to himself, tells us, that in the interval betwixt the instant when he felt he was going and the passing away of consciousness, all his life stood before him; as if some flash in a dark midnight, had lighted up a whole mountain country—there it all was! Ah, brethren, we know nothing yet about the rapidity with which we may gather before us a whole series of events; so that although we have to pass from one to another, the succession may be so swift, as to produce in our own minds the effect of all being co-existent and simultaneous. As the child, flashing about him a bit of burning stick, may seem to make a circle of flame, because the flame-point moves so quickly,—so memory, though it does go from point to point, and dwells for some inconceivably minute instant on each part of the remembrance, may yet be gifted with such lightning speed, with such rapidity and awful quickness of glance, as that to the man himself the effect shall be that his whole life is spread out there before him in one instant,

and that he, Godlike, sees the end and the beginning side by side. Yes; from the mountain of eternity we shall look down, and behold the whole plain spread before us. Down here we get lost and confused in the devious valleys that run off from the roots of the hills everywhere, and we cannot make out which way the streams are going, and what there is behind that low shoulder of hill yonder: but when we get to the summit peak, and look down, it will all shape itself into one consistent whole, and we shall see it all at once. The memory shall be perfect—perfect in the range of its grasp, and perfect in the rapidity with which it brings up all its objects before us at every instant.

Once more: it seems as if, in another world, memory would not only contain the whole life, and the whole life simultaneously; but would perpetually attend or haunt us. A CONSTANT REMEMBRANCE. It does not lie in our power even in this world, to decide very much whether we shall remember or forget. It does not come within a man's will to forget or to remember. He cannot say, "I will remember;" for if he could, he would have remembered already. He cannot say, "I will forget;" for the very effort fixes his attention on the obnoxious thing. All that we can do, when we seek to remember, is to wander back to somewhere about that point in our life where the shy thing lurks, and hope to catch some sight of it in the leafy coverts: and all we can do, when we want to forget, is to try and fill our mind with other subjects, and in the distractions of them to lose the oppressive and burdensome thoughts. But we know that that is but a partial remedy, that we cannot

succeed in doing it. There are "presences that will not be put by." There are memories that *will* start up before us, whether we are willing or not. Like the leprosy in the Israelite's house, the foul spot works its way out through all the plaster and the paint; and the house is foul because *it* is there. Oh, my friend, you are a happy and a singular man if there is nothing in your life that you have tried to bury, and the obstinate thing *will* not be buried, but meets you again when you come away from its fancied grave. I remember an old castle where they tell us of foul murder committed in a vaulted chamber with a narrow window, by torchlight one night; and there, they say, there are the streaks and stains of blood on the black oak floor; and they have planed, and scrubbed, and planed again, and thought they were gone —but there they always are, and continually up comes the dull reddish-black stain, as if oozing itself out through the boards to witness to the bloody crime again! The superstitious fable is a type of the way in which a foul thing, a sinful and bitter memory—gets engrained into a man's heart. He tries to banish it, and gets rid of it for a while. He goes back again, and the spots are there, and will be there for ever; and the only way to get rid of them is to destroy the soul in which they are.

Memory is not all within the power of the will on earth; and probably, memory in another world is still more involuntary and still more constant. Why? Because I read in the Bible that there is *work* in another world for God's servants to do; but I do not read that there is work for anybody else but God's servants to do. The work of an unforgiven sinner is done when he dies.

and that not only because he is going into the state of retribution, but because no rebel's work is going to be suffered in that world. The time for that is past. And so, if you will look, all the teachings of the Bible about the future state of those that are not in blessedness, give us this idea—a monotonous continuance of idleness, shutting them up to their own contemplations, the memories of the past and the agonies of the future. There are no distractions for such a man in another world. He has thought, he has conscience, he has remembrance. He has a sense of pain, of sin, of wrong, of loss. He has one "passive fixed endurance, all eternal and the same;" but I do not read that his pain is anodyned and his sorrow soothed by any activity that his hand finds to do. And, in a most tragic sense, we may say, "there is neither work, nor labour, nor device," in that dark world where the fruits of sin are reaped in monotonous suffering and ever-present pain. A memory, brethren, that *will* have its own way; what a field for sorrow and lamentation that is, when God says at last, "Now go—go apart; take thy life with thee; read it over; see what thou hast done with it!" One old Roman tyrant had a punishment in which he bound the dead body of the murdered to the living body of the murderer, and left them there scaffolded. And when that voice comes, "Son, remember!" to the living soul of the Godless, unbelieving, impenitent man, there is bound to him the murdered past, the dead past, his own life; and, in Milton's awful and profound words,

"Which way I fly is hell—myself am hell!"

There is only one other modification of this awful faculty that I would remind you of; and that is, that in a future life MEMORY WILL BE ASSOCIATED WITH A PERFECTLY ACCURATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONSEQUENCES, AND A PERFECTLY SENSITIVE CONSCIENCE AS TO THE CRIMINALITY OF THE PAST. You will have cause and consequence put down before you, meeting each other at last. There will be no room then to say, "I wonder how such and such a thing will work out," "I wonder how such a thing can have come upon me;" but every one will have his whole life to look back upon, and will see the childish sin that was the parent of the full-grown vice, and the everlasting sorrow that came out of that little and apparently transitory root. The conscience, which here becomes hardened by contact with sin, and enfeebled because unheeded, will then be restored to its early sensitiveness and power, as if the labourer's horny palm were to be endowed again with the softness of the infant's little hand. If you will take and think about that, brother, *there* is enough—without any more talk, without any more ghastly, sensual external figures—*there* is enough to make the boldest tremble; a memory embracing all the past, a memory rapidly grasping and constantly bringing its burden, a judgment which admits of no mistakes, and a conscience which has done with palliations and excuses!

It is not difficult to see how that is an instrument of torture. It is more difficult to see how such a memory can be a source of gladness; and yet it can. The old Greeks were pressed with that difficulty: they said to themselves, If a man remembers, there can be no Elysium

for him. And so they put the river of forgetfulness, the waters of Lethe, betwixt life and the happy plains. Ah, *we* do not want any river of oblivion betwixt us and everlasting blessedness. Calvary is on this side, and that is enough! Certainly it is one of the most blessed things about "the faith that is in Christ Jesus," that it makes a man remember his own sinfulness with penitence, not with pain—that it makes the memory of past transgressions full of solemn joy, because the memory of *past* transgressions but brings to mind the depth and rushing fulness of that river of love which has swept them all away as far as the east is from the west. Oh, brother, brother! you cannot forget your sins; but it lies within your own decision whether the remembrance shall be thankfulness and blessedness, or whether it shall be pain and loss for ever. Like some black rock that heaves itself above the surface of a sunlit sea, and the wave runs dashing over it; and the spray, as it falls down its sides, is all rainbowed and lightened; and there comes beauty into the mighty grimness of the black thing;—so a man's transgressions rear themselves up, and God's great love, coming sweeping itself against them and over them, makes out of the sin an occasion for the flashing more brightly of the beauty of His mercy, and turns the life of the pardoned penitent into a life of which even the sin is not pain to remember. So, then, lay your hand upon Christ Jesus. Put your heart into His keeping. Go to Him with your transgressions, He will forget them, and make it possible for you to remember them in such a way that the memory will become to you the very foundation of all your joy, and will make heaven's anthem

deeper and more harmonious when you say, "Now unto Him that hath washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, unto Him be glory for ever and ever!" And, on the other hand, *if not*, then, "Son, remember!" will be the word that begins the future retribution, and shuts you up with a waste past, with a gnawing conscience and an upbraiding heart: to say,

> "I backward cast my eye on prospects drear;
> And forward—though I cannot see, I guess and fear!"

THIRSTING FOR GOD.

PSALM xlii. 2.

My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God.

THIS whole Psalm reads like the sob of a wounded heart. The writer of it is shut out from the temple of his God, from the holy soil of his native land. One can see him sitting solitary yonder in the lonely wilderness (for the geographical details that occur in one part of the Psalm point to his situation as being on the other side of the Jordan, on the mountains of Moab)—can see him sitting there with long wistful gaze yearning across the narrow valley and the rushing stream that lay between him and the land of God's chosen people, and his eye resting perhaps on the mountain-top that looked down upon Jerusalem. He felt shut out from the presence of God. We need not suppose that he believed all the rest of the world was profane and God-forsaken, except only the temple. Nor need we wonder, on the other hand, that his faith did cling to forms, and that he thought the sparrows beneath the eaves of the temple blessed birds! He was depressed, because he was shut

out from the tokens of God's presence; and because he *was* depressed, he shut himself out from the reality of the presence. And so he cried with a cry which never is in vain, "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God!"

Taken, then, in its original sense, the words of our text apply only to that strange phenomenon which we call religious depression. But I have ventured to take them in a wider sense than that. It is not only Christian men who are cast down, whose souls "thirst for God." It is not only men upon earth whose souls thirst for God. All men, everywhere, may take this text for theirs. Every human heart may breathe it out, if it understands itself. The longing for "the living God," belongs to all men. Thwarted, stifled, it still survives. Unconscious, it is our deepest misery. Recognised, yielded to, accepted, it is the foundation of our highest blessings. Filled to the full, it still survives unsatiated and expectant. For all men upon earth, Christian or not Christian, for Christians here below, whether in times of depression or in times of gladness, and for the blessed and calm spirits that in ecstasy of longing, full of fruition, stand around God's throne—it is equally true, their "souls thirst for God, for the living God." Only with this difference, that to some the desire is misery and death, and to some the desire is life and perfect blessedness. So that the first thought I would suggest to you this evening is, that there is an unconscious and unsatisfied longing after God, which is what we call the state of nature;—secondly, that there is an imperfect longing after God, fully satisfied, which is what we call the state of grace;—and lastly,

that there is a perfect longing, perfectly satisfied, which is what we call the state of glory. Nature; religion upon earth; blessedness in heaven—my text is the expression, in divers senses, for them all.

In the first place, then, there is in every man AN UNCONSCIOUS AND UNSATISFIED LONGING AFTER GOD, AND THAT IS THE STATE OF NATURE. Experience is the test of that principle. And the most superficial examination of the facts of daily life, as well as the questioning of our own souls, will tell us that *this* is the leading feature of them—a state of unrest. What is it that one of those deistic poets of our own land says, about "Man never *is*, but always *to be* blest"? What is the meaning of the fact that all round about us, and we partaking of it, there is ceaseless, gigantic activity going on? The very fact that men work, the very fact of activity in the mind and life, noble as it is, and root of all that is good, and beautiful as it is, is still the testimony of nature to this —I by myself am full of passionate longings, of earnest desires, of unsupplied wants. "I thirst," is the voice of the whole world.

No man is made to be satisfied from himself. For the stilling of our own hearts, for the satisfying of our own nature, for the strengthening and joy of our being, we need to go beyond ourselves, and to fix upon something external to ourselves. We are not independent. None of us can stand by himself. No man carries within him the fountain from which he can draw. If a heart is to be blessed, it must go out of the narrow circle of its own individuality; and if a man's life is to be strong and happy, he must get the foundation of his strength some-

where else than in his own soul. And, my friends, especially you young men, all that modern doctrine of self-reliance, though it has a true side to it, has also a frightfully false side. Though it may be quite true that a man ought to be, in one sense, sufficient for himself, and that there is no real blessedness of which the root does not lie within the nature and heart of the man; though all that be quite true, yet, if the doctrine means (as on the lips of many a modern eloquent and powerful teacher of it, it does mean) that we can do without God, that we may be self-reliant and self-sufficient, and proudly neglectful of all the Divine forces that come down into life to brighten and gladden it, it is a lie, false and fatal; and of all the falsehoods that are going about this world at present, I know not one that is varnished over with more apparent truth, that is smeared over with more of the honey that catches young, ardent, ingenuous hearts, than that half-truth, and therefore most deceptive error, which preaches independence, and self-reliance, and which *means*,—a man's soul does not "thirst for the living God." Take care of it! We are made *not* to be independent.

We are made, next, to need, not *things*, but *living beings*. "My soul thirsteth"—for what? An abstraction, a possession, riches, a thing? No! "my soul thirsteth for God, for *the living God*." Yes, hearts want hearts. The converse of Christ's saying is equally true; He said, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit;" man has a spirit, and man must have Spirit to worship, to lean upon, to live by, or all will be inefficient and unsatisfactory. Oh, lay this

to heart, my brother,—no *things* can satisfy a living soul. No accumulation of dead matter can become the life of an immortal being. The two classes are separated by the whole diameter of the universe—matter and spirit, thing and person ; and *you* cannot feed yourself upon the dead husks that lie there round about you—wealth, position, honour. Books, thoughts, though they are nobler than these other, are still inefficient. Principles, "causes," emotions springing from truth, these are not enough. I want more than that, I want something to love, something to lay a hand upon, that shall return the grasp of the hand. A living man must have a living God, or his soul will perish in the midst of earthly plenty, and will thirst and die whilst the water of earthly delights is running all around him. We are made to need *persons*, not *things !*

Then again, we need *one* Being who shall be all-sufficient. There is no greater misery than that which may ensue from the attempt to satisfy our souls by the accumulation of objects, each of them imperfect and finite, which yet we fancy, woven together, will make an adequate whole. When a heart is diverted from its one central purpose, when a life is split up in a hundred different directions and into a hundred different emotions, it is like a beam of light passed through some broken surface where it is all refracted and shivered into fragments ; there is no clear vision, there is no perfect light. If a man is to be blessed, he must have *one* source where he can go. The merchantman that seeks for many goodly pearls, may find the many ; but until he has bartered them all for *the one*, there is something lacking

Not only the understanding requires to pass through the manifold, up and up in ever higher generalizations, till it reaches the One from which they all come; but the heart requires to soar, if it would be at rest, through all the diverse regions where its love may legitimately tarry for a while, until it reaches the sole and central throne of the universe, and there it may cease its flight, and fold its weary wings, and sleep like a bird within its nest. We want a *being*, and we want *one Being* in whom shall be sphered all perfection, in whom shall abide all power and blessedness; beyond whom thought cannot pass, out of whose infinite circumference love does not need to wander; besides whose boundless treasures no other riches can be required; who is light for the understanding, power for the will, authority for the practical life, purpose for the efforts, motive for the doings, end and object for the feelings, home of the affections, light of our seeing, life of our love, the love of our heart, the one living God, infinite in wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth; who is all in all, and without whom everything else is misery. "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God."

Brother, let me ask you the question, before I pass on—the question for the sake of which I am preaching this sermon: Do *you* know that Father? I know this much, that every heart here now answers an Amen (if it will be honest) to what I have been saying. Unrest; panting, desperate thirst, deceiving itself as to where it should go; slaking itself "at the gilded puddles that the beasts would cough at," instead of coming to the water of life!—that is the state of man without God. That is

nature. That is irreligion. The condition in which every man is that is not trusting to God in Jesus Christ, is this—thirsting for God, and not knowing *whom* he is thirsting for, nor getting the supply that he wants.

Secondly, there is A CONSCIOUS LONGING, IMPERFECT, BUT ANSWERED; AND THAT IS THE STATE OF GRACE—the beginning of religion in a man's soul. If it be true that there are, as part of the universal human experience, however overlaid and stifled, these necessities of which I have been speaking, the very existence of the necessities affords a presumption, before all evidence, that, somehow and somewhere, they shall be supplied. There can be no deeper truth—none, I think, that ought to have more power in shaping some parts of our Christian creed, than this,—God is a faithful Creator; and where He makes men with longings, it is a prophecy that those longings are going to be supplied. The same ground which avails to defend doctrines that cannot be so well defended by any other argument—the same ground on which we say that there is an immortality, because men long for it and believe in it; that there is a God because men cannot get rid of the instinctive conviction that there is; that there is a retribution, because men's consciences do ask for it, and cry out for it,—the very same process which may be applied to the buttressing and defending of all the grandest truths of the Gospel, applies also in this practical matter. If I, made by God who knew what He was doing when He made me, am formed with these deep necessities, with these passionate longings, —then it cannot but be that it is intended that they should be to me a means of leading me to Him, and

that there they should be satisfied. For He is "the faithful Creator," and He remembers the conditions under which His making of us has placed us. "He knoweth our frame," and He remembereth what He has implanted within us. And the presumption is, of course, turned into an actual certainty when we let in the light of the Gospel upon the thing. Then we can say to every man that thus is yearning after a goodness dimly perceived, and does not know what it is that he wants, and we say to you now, Brother, betake yourself to the cross of Christ: go with those wants of yours to 'the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world:' He will interpret them to you. He will explain to you, as you do not now know, what they mean; and, better than that, He will supply them all! Your souls are thirsting; and you look about, here and there, and everywhere, for springs of water. *There* is the fountain—go to Christ. Your souls are thirsting for God. The unfathomed ocean of the Godhead lies far beyond *my* lip; but *here* is the stream through which there flows that river of water of life. Here is the manifested God, here is the granted God, here is the Godhead coming into connexion and union with man, his wants and his sins—the "living God" and His living Son, His everlasting Word. He that believeth upon Him shall never hunger, and he that cometh unto Him shall never thirst. God is the divine and unfathomable ocean; Christ the Son is the stream that brings salvation to every man's lips. All wants are supplied there. Take it as a piece of the simplest prose, with no rhetorical exaggeration about it, that Christ is *everything*, everything that a man can want.

We are made to require, and to be restless until we possess, perfect truth:—there it is! We are made to want, and to be restless until we get, perfect, infinite unchangeable love:—there it is! We must have, or the burden of our own self-will will be a misery to us, a hand laid upon the springs of our conduct, authoritative and purifying, and have the blessedness of some voice to say to us, I bid thee, and that is enough:—there it is! We must have rest, purity, hope, gladness, life in our souls:—there they all are! Whatever form of human nature and character be yours, my brother—whatever exigencies of life you may be lying under the pressure of—man or woman, adult or child, father or son, man of business or man of thought, struggling with difficulties or bright with joy—oh, believe us, the perfecting of your character may be got in the Lamb of God, and without Him it never can be possessed. Christ is everything, and "out of His fulness all we receive grace for grace."

Not only in Christ is there the perfect supply of all these necessities, but also that fulness *becomes ours* on the simple condition of desiring it. The thirst for the living God in a man who has faith in Christ Jesus, is not a thirst which amounts to pain, or arises from a sense of non-possession. But in this Divine region the principle of the giving is this—to desire is to have; to long is to possess. There is no long interval between the sense of thirst and the trickling of the stream over the parched lip; but ever it is flowing, flowing past us, and the desire is but the opening of the lips to receive the limpid and life-giving waters. No one ever desired the grace of God, really and truly desired it; but just in proportion as he

desired it, he got it—just in proportion as he thirsted, he was satisfied. Therefore we have to preach that grand Gospel that Faith, simple, conscious longing, turned to Christ, avails to bring down the full and perfect supply. But some Christian people here may reply, "Ah, I wish it were so: what was that you were saying at the beginning of your sermon, about men having religious depression, about Christians longing and not possessing?" Well, I have only this to say about that matter. Wherever in a heart that really believes on God in Christ, there is a thirst that amounts to pain, and that has with it a sense of non-possession, that is not because Christ's fulness has become shrunken; that is not because there is a change in God's law, that the measure of the desire is the measure of the reception; but it is only because, for some reason or other that belongs to the man alone, the desire is not deep, genuine, simple, but is troubled and darkened. What we ask, we get. If I am a Christian, however feeble I may be, the feebleness of my faith and the feebleness of my desire may make my supplies of grace feeble; but if I am a Christian, there is no such thing as an earnest longing unsatisfied, no such thing as a thirst accompanied with a pain and sense of want, except in consequence of my own transgression.

And thus there *is* a longing imperfect in this life, but fully supplied according to the measure of its intensity, a longing after "the living God;" and that is the state of a Christian man. And oh, my friend! that is a widely different desire from the other that I have been speaking about. It is blessed thus to say, "My soul thirsteth for

God." It is blessed to feel the passionate wish for more light, more grace, more peace, more wisdom, more of God. That *is* joy, that *is* peace! Is that *your* experience in this present life?

Lastly, there is a PERFECT LONGING PERFECTLY SATISFIED; AND THAT IS HEAVEN. We shall not there be independent, of course, of constant supplies from the great central Fulness, any more than we are here. One may see in one aspect, that just as the Christian life here on earth is in a very true sense a state of never thirsting any more, because we *have* Christ, and yet in another sense is a state of continual longing and desire,—so the Christian and glorified life in heaven, in one view of it, is the removal of all that thirst which marked the condition of man upon earth, and in another is the perfecting of all those aspirations and desires. Thirst, as longing, is eternal; thirst, as aspiration after God, is the glory of heaven; thirst, as desire for more of Him, is the very condition of the celestial world, and the element of all its blessedness. That future life gives us two elements, an infinite God, and an indefinitely expansible human spirit: an infinite God to fill, and a soul to be filled, the measure and the capacity of which has no limit set to it that we can see. What will be the consequence of the contact of these two? Why this, for the first thing, that always, at every moment of that blessed life, there shall be a perpetual fruition, a perpetual satisfaction, a deep and full fountain filling the whole soul with the refreshment of its waves and the music of its flow. And yet, and yet,—though at every moment in heaven we shall be satisfied, filled full of God, full to overflowing in all our powers,—yet the

very fact that the God who dwells in us, and fills our whole natures with unsullied and perfect blessedness, is an infinite God ; and that we in whom the infinite Father dwells, are men with souls that can grow, and can grow for ever—will result in this, that at every moment our capacities will expand ; that at every moment, therefore, the desire will grow and spring afresh ; that at every moment God will be seen unveiling undreamed-of beauties, and revealing hitherto unknown heights of blessedness before us ; and that the sight of that transcendent, unapproached, unapproachable, and yet attracting and transforming glory, will draw us onward as by an impulse from above, and the possession of some portion of it will bear us upward as by a power from within ; and so, nearer, nearer, ever nearer to the throne of light, the centre of blessedness, the growing, and glorifying, and greatening souls of the perfectly and increasingly blessed shall mount up with wings as eagles. Heaven *is* endless longing, accompanied with an endless fruition —a longing which is blessedness, a longing which is life !

My brother, let me put two sayings of Scripture side by side, " My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God " —" Father Abraham, send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue." There be two thirsts, one the longing for God, which, satisfied, is heaven ; one, the longing for cessation of the self-lit fires, and for one drop of the lost delights of earth to cool the thirsty throat, which, unsatisfied, is hell. Then hearken to the final vision on the page of Scripture, " He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal,

proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." To us it is showed, and to us the whole revelation of God converges to that last mighty call, "Let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

THE JOY OF THE LORD.

NEHEMIAH viii. 10.

The joy of the Lord is your strength.

JUDAISM, in its formal and ceremonial aspect, was a religion of gladness. The feast was the great act of worship. It is not to be wondered at, that Christianity, the perfecting of that ancient system, has been less markedly felt to be a religion of joy; for it brings with it far deeper and more solemn views about man in his nature, condition, responsibilities, destinies, than ever prevailed before, under any system of worship. And yet all deep religion ought to be joyful, and all strong religion assuredly will be.

Here, in the incident before us, there has come a time in Nehemiah's great enterprise, when the law, long forgotten, long broken by the captives, is now to be established again as the rule of the newly-founded commonwealth. Naturally enough there comes a remembrance of many sins in the past history of the people; and tears not unnaturally mingle with the thankfulness that again they are a nation, having a Divine worship and a Divine law in their midst. The

leader of them, knowing for one thing that if the spirits of his people once began to flag, they could not face nor conquer the difficulties of their position, said to them, This day is holy unto the Lord: this feast that we are keeping is a day of devout worship; therefore mourn not, nor weep: "go your way; eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." You will make nothing of it by indulgence in lamentation and in mourning. You will have no more power for obedience, you will not be fit for your work, if you fall into a desponding state. Be thankful and glad; and remember that the purest worship is the worship of God-fixed joy, "the joy of the Lord is your strength." And that is as true, brethren, with regard to us, as it ever was in these old times; and we, I think, need the lesson contained in this saying of Nehemiah's, because of some prevalent tendencies amongst us, no less than these Jews did. Take some simple thoughts suggested by this text which are both important in themselves and needful to be made emphatic because so often forgotten in the ordinary type of Christian character. They are these. Religious Joy is the natural result of Faith. It is a Christian duty. It is an important element in Christian strength.

First, JOY IN THE LORD IS THE NATURAL RESULT OF CHRISTIAN FAITH. There is a natural adaptation or provision in the Gospel, both by what it brings to us and by what it takes away from us, to make a calm, and settled, and deep gladness, the prevalent temper of the Christian spirit. In what it gives us, I say, and in what

it takes away from us. It gives us what we call well a sense of acceptance with God, it gives us God for the rest of our spirits, it gives us the communion with Him which in proportion as it is real, will be still; and in pro portion as it is still, will be all bright and joyful. It takes away from us the fear that lies before us, the strifes that lie within us, the desperate conflict that is waged between a man's conscience and his inclinations, between his will and his passions, which tears the heart asunder, and always makes sorrow and tumult wherever it comes. It takes away the sense of sin. It gives us, instead of the torpid conscience, or the angrily-stinging conscience—it gives us a conscience all calm from its accusations, with all the sting drawn out of it:—for quiet peace lies in the heart of the man that is trusting in the Lord. The Gospel works joy, because the soul is at rest in God; joy, because every function of the spiritual nature has found now its haven and its object; joy, because health has come, and the healthy working of the body or of the spirit is itself a gladness; joy, because the dim future is painted (where it is painted at all) with shapes of light and beauty, and because the very vagueness of these is an element in the greatness of its revelation. The joy that is in Christ is deep and abiding. Faith in Him naturally works gladness.

I do not forget that, on the other side, it is equally true that the Christian faith has as marked and almost as strong an adaptation to produce a solemn *sorrow*—solemn, manly, noble, and strong. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," is the rule of the Christian life. If we think of what our faith does; of the light that it casts

upon our condition, upon our nature, upon our reponsibilities, upon our sins, and upon our destinies, we can easily see how, if gladness be one part of its operation, no less really and truly is sadness another. Brethren, all great thoughts have a solemn quiet in them, which not unfrequently merges into a still sorrow. There is nothing more contemptible in itself, and there is no more sure mark of a trivial nature and a trivial round of occupations, than unshaded gladness, that rests on no deep foundations of quiet, patient grief; grief, because I know what I am and what I ought to be; grief, because I have learnt the "exceeding sinfulness of sin;" grief, because, looking out upon the world, I see, as other men do not see, hell-fire burning at the back of the mirth and the laughter, and know what it is that men are hurrying to! Do you remember who it was that stood by the side of the one poor dumb man, whose tongue He was going to loose, and looking up to heaven *sighed* before He could say, "Be opened?" Do you remember that of Him it is said, "God hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows;" and also, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief?" And do you not think that both these characteristics are to be repeated in the operations of His Gospel upon every heart that receives it? And if, by the hopes it breathes into us, by the fears that it takes away from us, by the union with God that it accomplishes for us, by the fellowship that it implants in us, it indeed anoints us all "with the oil of gladness;" yet, on the other hand, by the sense of mine own sin that it teaches me; by the conflict with weakness which it makes to be the law of my life; by the clear vision

which it gives me of "the law of my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into subjection;" by the intensity which it breathes into all my nature, and by the thoughts that it presents of what sin leads to, and what the world at present is, the Gospel, wheresoever it comes, will infuse a wise, valiant, sadness as the very foundation of character. Yes, joy, but sorrow too! the joy of the Lord, but sorrow as we look on our own sin and the world's woe! the head anointed with the oil of gladness, but also crowned with thorns! These two are not contradictory. These two states of mind, both of them the natural operations of any deep faith, may co-exist and blend into one another, so as that the gladness is sobered, and chastened, and made manly and noble; and that the sorrow is like some thunder-cloud, all streaked with bars of sunshine, that go into its deepest depths. The joy lives in the midst of the sorrow; the sorrow springs from the same root as the gladness. The two do not clash against each other, or reduce the emotion to a neutral indifference, but they blend into one another; just as, in the Arctic regions, deep down beneath the cold snow, with its white desolation and its barren death, you shall find the budding of the early spring flowers and the fresh green grass; just as some kinds of fire burn below the water; just as, in the midst of the barren and undrinkable sea, there may be welling up some little fountain of fresh water that comes from a deeper depth than the great ocean around it, and pours its sweet streams along the surface of the salt waste. Gladness, because I love, for love *is* gladness; gladness, because I trust, for trust *is* gladness; gladness, because I

obey, for obedience is a "meat that others know not of," and light comes when we do His will! But sorrow, because still I am wrestling with sin; sorrow, because still I have not perfect fellowship; sorrow, because mine eye, purified by my living with God, sees earth, and sin, and life, and death, and the generations of men, and the darkness beyond, in some measure as God sees them! And yet, the sorrow is surface, and the joy is central; the sorrow springs from circumstance, and the gladness from the essence of the thing;—and therefore the sorrow is transitory, and the gladness is perennial. For the Christian life is all like one of those sweet Spring showers in early April, when the rain-drops weave for us a mist that hides the sunshine; and yet the hidden sun is in every sparkling drop, and they are all saturated and steeped in its light. "The joy of the Lord" is the natural result and offspring of all Christian faith.

And now, secondly, the "joy of the Lord" or rejoicing in God, is A MATTER OF CHRISTIAN DUTY. It is a commandment here, and it is a command in the New Testament as well. "Neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." I need not quote to you the frequent repetitions of the same injunction which the Apostle Paul gives us, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice;" "Rejoice evermore," and the like. The fact that this joy is enjoined us suggests to us a thought or two worth looking at.

You may say with truth, My emotions of joy and sorrow are not under my own control: I cannot help being glad and sad as circumstances dictate. But yet here it lies, a commandment. It is a duty, a thing that the Apostle

enjoins; from which, of course, it follows, that somehow or other it is to a large extent within one's own power, and that even the indulgence in this emotion, and the degree to which a Christian life shall be a cheerful life, is dependent in a large measure on our own volitions, and stands on the same footing as our obedience to God's other commandments.

We *can* to a very great extent control even our own emotions; but then, besides, we can do more than that. It may be quite true, that you cannot help feeling sorrowful in the presence of sorrowful thoughts, and glad in the presence of thoughts that naturally kindle gladness. But I will tell you what you can do or refrain from doing —you can either go and stand in the light, or you can go and stand in the shadow. You can either fix your attention upon, and make the predominant subject of your religious contemplations, a truth which shall make you glad and strong, or a half-truth, which shall make you sorrowful, and therefore weak. Your meditations may either centre mainly upon your own selves, your faults and failings, and the like; or they may centre mainly upon God and His Love, Christ and His Grace, the Holy Spirit and His Communion. You may either fill your soul with joyful thoughts, or though a true Christian, a real, devout, God-accepted believer, you may be so misapprehending the nature of the Gospel, and your relation to it, its promises and precepts, its duties and predictions, as that the prevalent tinge and cast of your religion shall be solemn and almost gloomy, but not lighted up and irradiated with the felt sense of God's presence—with the strong, healthy consciousness that

you are a forgiven and a justified man, and that you are going to be a glorified one.

And thus far (and it is a long way) by the selection or the rejection of the appropriate and proper subjects which shall make the main portion of our religious contemplation, and shall be the food of our devout thoughts, we *can* determine the complexion of our religious life. Just as you inject colouring matter into the fibres of some anatomical preparation; so a Christian may, as it were, inject into all the veins of his religious character and life, either the bright tints of gladness or the dark ones of self-despondency; and the result will be according to the thing that he has put into them. If your thoughts are chiefly occupied with God, and what He has done and is for you, then you will have peaceful joy. If, on the other hand, they are bent ever on yourself and your own unbelief, then you will always be sad. You can make your choice.

The joy of the Lord is a duty, Christian men. It is so because, as we have seen, it is the natural effect of faith, because we can do much to regulate our emotions directly, and much more to determine them by determining what set of thoughts shall engage us. A wise and strong faith is our duty. To keep our emotional nature well under control of reason and will is our duty. To lose thoughts of ourselves in God's truth about Himself is our duty. If we do these things, we cannot fail to have Christ's Joy remaining in us, and making ours full. If we have not that blessed possession abiding with us, which He lived and died to give us, there is something wrong in us somewhere

It seems to me that this is a truth which we have great need, my friends, to lay to heart. It is of no great consequence that we should practically confute the impotent, old sneer about religion as being a gloomy thing. One does not need to mind much what some people say on that matter. The world would call "the joy of the Lord" gloom, just as much as it calls "godly sorrow" gloom. But we are losing for ourselves a power and an energy of which we have no conception, unless we feel that joy is a duty, and unless we believe that not to be joyful in the Lord is, therefore, more than a misfortune, it is a fault.

I do not forget that the comparative absence of this happy, peaceful sense of acceptance, harmony, oneness with God, springs sometimes from temperament, and depends on our natural dispositions. Of course the natural character determines to a large extent the perspective of our conceptions of Christian truth, and the colouring of our inner religious life. I do not mean to say, for a moment, that there is one uniform type to which all must be conformed, or sin. There is indeed one type, the perfect manhood of Jesus, but it is all comprehensive, and each variety of our fragmentary manhood finds its own perfecting, and not its transmutation to another fashion of man, in being conformed to Him. Some of us are naturally faint-hearted, timid, sceptical of any success, grave, melancholy, or hard to stir to any emotion. To such there will be an added difficulty in making quiet confident joy any very familiar guest in their home or in their place of prayer. But even such should remember that the "powers of the world to come" the energies of the Gospel are given

to us for the very express purpose of overcoming, as well as of hallowing natural dispositions. If it be our duty to rejoice in the Lord, it is no sufficient excuse to urge for not responding to the reiterated call, "In myself I am disposed to sadness."

Whilst making all allowances for the diversities of character, which will always operate to diversify the history of the inner life in each individual, we think that, in the great majority of instances, there are two things, both faults, which have a great deal more to do with the absence of joy from much Christian experience than any unfortunate natural tendency to the dark side of things. The one is, an actual deficiency in the depth and reality of our faith; and the other is, a misapprehension of the position which we have a right to take and are bound to take.

An actual deficiency in our faith. Oh, brethren, it is not to be wondered at that Christians do not find that the Lord with them is the Lord their strength and joy, as well as the Lord "their righteousness;" when the amount of their fellowship with Him is so small, and the depth of it so shallow as we usually find it. The first true vision that a sinful soul has of God, the imperfect beginnings of religion, usually are accompanied with intense self-abhorrence, and sorrowing tears of penitence. A further closer vision of the Love of God in Jesus Christ brings with it "joy and peace in believing." But the prolongation of these throughout life requires the stedfast continuousness of gaze towards Him. It is only where there is much faith and consequent love that there is much joy. Let us search our own hearts. If there is

but little heat around the bulb of the thermometer, no wonder that the mercury marks a low degree. If there is but small faith, there will not be much gladness. The road into Giant Despair's castle is through doubt, which doubt comes from an absence, a sinful absence, in our own experience, of the felt presence of God, and the felt force of the verities of His Gospel.

But then, besides that, there is another fault: not a fault in the sense of crime or sin, but a fault (and a great one) in the sense of error and misapprehension. We as Christians do not take the position which we have a right to take and that we are bound to take. Men venture themselves upon God's word as they do on doubtful ice, timidly putting a light foot out, to feel if it will bear them, and always having the tacit fear, "Now, it is going to crack!" You must cast yourselves on God's Gospel with all your weight, without any hanging back, without any doubt, without even the shadow of a suspicion that it will *give*—that the firm, pure floor will give, and let you through into the water! A Christian shrink from saying what the Apostle said, "I *know* in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day"! A Christian fancy that salvation is a future thing, and forget that it is a present thing! A Christian tremble to profess "assurance of hope," forgetting that there is no hope strong enough to bear the stress of a life's sorrows, which is not a conviction certain as one's own existence! Brethren, understand that the Gospel is a Gospel which brings a present salvation; and try to feel that it is not presumption, but simply acting out the very fundamental

principle of it, when you are not afraid to say, I *know* that my Redeemer is yonder, and I *know* that He loves me! Try to feel, I say, that by faith you have a right to take that position, "Now we *know* that we are the sons of God;" that you have a right to claim for yourselves, and that you are falling beneath the loftiness of the gift that is given to you unless you do claim for yourselves, the place of sons, accepted, loved, sure to be glorified at God's right hand. Am I teaching presumption? am I teaching carelessness, or a dispensing with self-examination? No, but I am saying this: If a man has once felt, and feels, in however small and feeble a degree, and depressed by whatsoever sense of daily transgressions, if he feel, faint like the first movement of an imprisoned bird in its egg, the feeble pulse of an almost imperceptible and fluttering faith beat—then that man has a right to say, "God is mine!"

As one of our great teachers, not long gone from us, said, "Let me take my personal salvation for granted"—and what? and "be idle?" No; "and *work* from it." Ay, brethren, a Christian is not to be for ever asking himself, "Am I a Christian?" He is not to be for ever looking into himself for marks and signs that he is. He *is* to look into himself to discover sins, that he may by God's help cast them out, to discover sins that shall teach him to say with greater thankfulness, "What a redemption this is which I possess!" but he is to base his convictions that he is God's child upon something other than his own characteristics and the feebleness of his own strength. He is to have "joy in the Lord' whatever may be his sorrow from outward things. And I believe

that if Christian people would lay that thought to heart, they would understand better how the natural operation of the Gospel is to make gladness, and how rejoicing in the Lord is a Christian duty.

And now with regard to the other thought that still remains to be considered, namely, that REJOICING IN THE LORD IS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH,—I have already anticipated, fragmentarily, nearly all that I could have said here in a more systematic form. All gladness has something to do with our efficiency; for it is the prerogative of man that his force comes from his mind, and not from his body. That old song about a sad heart tiring in a mile, is as true in regard to the Gospel, and the works of Christian people, as in any other case. If we have hearts full of light, and souls at rest in Christ, and the wealth and blessedness of a tranquil gladness lying there, and filling our being; work will be easy, endurance will be easy, sorrow will be bearable, trials will not be so very hard; and above all temptations we shall be lifted, and set upon a rock. If the soul is full, and full of joy, what side will be exposed to the assault of *any* temptation? If it appeal to fear, the gladness that is there is an answer. If it appeal to passion, desire, wish for pleasure of any sort, there is no need for any more—the heart is *full*. And so the gladness which rests in Christ will be a gladness which will fit us for all service and for all endurance, which will be unbroken by any sorrow, and, like the magic shield of the old legends, invisible, slender, in its crystalline purity will stand before the tempted heart, and will repel all the "fiery darts of the wicked."

"The joy of the Lord is your strength," my brother.

Nothing else is. No vehement resolutions, no sense of your own sinfulness, nor even contrite remembrance of past failures, ever made a man strong yet. It made him weak that he might become strong, and when it had done that it had done its work. For strength there must be hope, for strength there must be joy. If the arm is to smite with vigour, it must smite at the bidding of a calm and light heart. The Christian work is of such a sort as that the most dangerous opponent to it is simple despondency and simple sorrow. "The joy of the Lord is strength."

Well then, there are two questions: How comes it that so much of the world's joy is weakness? and how comes it that so much of the world's notion of religion is gloom and sadness? Answer them for yourselves, and remember: You are weak unless you are glad; you are not glad and strong unless your faith and hope are fixed in Christ, and unless you are working from and not towards the assurance of salvation, from and not towards the sense of pardon, from and not towards the conviction of acceptance with God!

THE DYING THIEF.

St. Luke xxiii. 42.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.

THERE is an old and true division of the work of Christ into three parts—prophet, priest, and king. Such a distinction manifestly exists, though it may be over-estimated, or rather, the statement of it may be exaggerated, if it be supposed that separate acts of His discharge these separate functions, and that He ceases to be the one before He becomes the other. Rather it is true that all His work is prophetic, that all His work is priestly, and that His prophetic and priestly work is the exercise of His kingly authority. But still the division is a true one, and helps to set before us, clearly and definitely, the wide range of the benefits of Christ's mission and death. It is noteworthy that these three groups round the cross, the third of which we have to speak about now—that of the "daughters of Jerusalem," that of the deriding scribes and the indifferent soldiers, and this one of the two thieves—each present us Christ in one of the three characters. The words that He spoke

upon the cross, with reference to others than Himself, may be gathered around, and arranged under, that threefold aspect of Christ's work. The *prophet* said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, for the days are coming." The *priest* said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The *king*, in His sovereignty, ruled the heart of that penitent man from His cross, and while the crown shone athwart the smoke and the agony of the death, the king "opened the gates of the kingdom of heaven unto all believers" when He said, "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise!"

We shall not attempt, in dealing with this incident, to paint pictures. I have a far more important thing to do than even to try to bring vividly before your minds the scene on that little hill of Calvary. It is the meaning that we are concerned with, and not the mere externals. I take it for granted, then, that we know the details:—the dying man in his agony, beginning to see dimly, as his soul closed upon earthly things, who this was—patient, loving, mighty there in His sufferings; and using his last breath to cry, "Lord, remember me!"—and the sufferer throned in the majesty of His meekness, and Divinity of His endurance; calm, conscious, full of felt but silent power, accepting homage, bending to the penitence, loving the sinner, and flinging open the gates of the pale kingdoms into which He was to pass, with these His last words.

First, then, we see here an illustration of THE CROSS IN ITS POWER OF DRAWING MEN TO ITSELF. It is strange to think that, perhaps, at that moment the only human

being that thoroughly believed in Christ was that dying robber. The disciples are all gone. The most faithful of them are recreant, denying, fleeing. A handful of women are standing there, not knowing what to think about it, stunned but loving; and alone (as I suppose) alone of all the sons of men, the crucified malefactor was in the sunshine of faith, and could say, "I believe!" As everything of the future history of the world and of the Gospel is typified in the events of the crucifixion, it was fitting that here again, and at the last, there should be a prophetic fulfilment of His own saying, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

But mark, here we have a striking instance of the universal law of the progress of the Gospel, in the two-fold effort of the contemplation of the cross. By its foot was to be seen the derision of the scribes and the stupor of the soldiery; and now here are the two thieves—the one chiming in with the universal reproaches; and the other beholding the same event, having the same circumstances displayed before him, and they influence him *thus*. Brethren, it is just the history of the Gospel wherever it goes. It is its history now, and in this congregation. The Gospel is preached equally to every man. The same message comes to us all, offering us the same terms. Christ stands before each of us in the same attitude. And what is the consequence? A parting of the whole mass of us, some on one side and some on the other. As when you take a magnet, and hold it to an indiscriminate heap of metal filings, it will gather out all the iron, and leave behind all the rest! "I, if I be lifted up," said He, "will draw all men unto Me." The

attractive power will go out over the whole race of His brethren; but from some there will be no response. In some hearts there will be no yielding to the attraction. Some will remain rooted, obstinate, stedfast in their place; and to some the lightest word will be mighty enough to stir all the slumbering pulses of their sin-ridden hearts, and to bring them, broken and penitent, for mercy to His feet. To the one He is "a savour of life unto life, and to the other a savour of death unto death." The broadest doctrine of the universal adaptation, and the universal intention too, of the Gospel, as the "power of God unto salvation," contains hidden in its depths this undeniable fact, that, be the cause what it may (and, as I believe, the cause lies with us, and is our fault) this separating, judging effect follows from all faithful preaching of Christ's words. He came to judge the world, "that they which see not (as He himself said) might see, and they which see might be made blind." And on the cross that process went on in two men, alike in necessity, alike in criminality, alike in this, that Death's icy finger was just being laid upon their heart, to stop all the flow of its wild blood and passion, but different in this, that the one of them turned himself, by God's grace, and laid hold on the Gospel that was offered to him, and the other turned himself away, and derided, and died.

And now, there is another consideration. If we look at this man, this penitent thief, and contrast him, his previous history, and his present feelings, with the people that stood around, and rejected and scoffed, we get some light as to the sort of thing that unfits men for perceiving and accepting the Gospel when it is offered to them.

Remember the other classes of persons who were there. There were Roman soldiers, with very partial knowledge of what they were doing, and whose only feeling was that of entire indifference; and there were Jewish Rabbis, Pharisees, Priests, and people, who knew a little more of what they were doing, and whose feeling was derision and scorn. Now, if we mark the ordinary scriptural representation, especially as to the last class, we cannot help seeing that there comes out this principle:—The thing of all others that unfits men for the reception of Christ as a Saviour, and for the simple reliance on His atoning blood and Divine mercy, is not gross, long profligacy, and outward, vehement transgression; but it is self-complacency, clean, fatal self-righteousness and self-sufficiency.

Why was it that Scribes and Pharisees turned away from Him? For three reasons. Because of their *pride of wisdom*. "We are the men who know all about Moses and the traditions of the elders; we judge this new phenomenon not by the question, How does it come to our consciences, and how does it appeal to our hearts? but we judge it by the question, How does it fit our Rabbinical learning and subtle casuistical laws? *We* are the Priests and the Scribes; and the people that know not the law, *they* may accept a thing that only appeals to the common human heart, but for us, in our intellectual superiority, living remote from the common wants of the lower class, not needing a rough outward Gospel of that sort, we can do without such a thing, and we reject it." They turned away from the cross, and their hatred darkened into derision, and their menaces ended in a

crucifixion, not merely because of a pride of wisdom, but because of a *complacent self-righteousness* that knew nothing of the fact of sin, that never had learned to believe itself to be full of evil, that had got so wrapped up in ceremonies as to have lost the life; that had degraded the Divine law of God, with all its lightning splendours, and awful power, into a matter of "mint and anise and cummin." They turned away for a third reason. *Religion had become to them a mere set of traditional dogmas*, to think accurately or to reason clearly about which was all that was needful. Worship having become ceremonial, and morality having become casuistry, and religion having become theology, the men were as hard as a nether millstone, and there was nothing to be done with them until these three crusts were peeled off the heart, and, close and burning, the naked heart and the naked truth of God came into contact.

Brethren, change the name, and the story is true about *us*. God forbid that I should deny that every form of gross, sensual immorality, "hardens all within (as one poor victim of it said), and petrifies the feeling." God forbid that I should seem to be speaking slightingly of the exceeding sinfulness of such sin, or to be pouring contempt upon the laws of common morality! Do not misapprehend me so. Still it is not sin in its outward forms that makes the worst impediment between a man and the cross, but it is sin plus self-righteousness which makes the insurmountable obstacle to all faith and repentance. And oh! in our days, when passion is tamed down by so many bonds and chains; when the power of

society lies upon all of us, prescribing our path, and keeping most of us from vice, partly because we are not tempted, and partly because we have been brought up like some young trees behind a wall, within the fence of decent customs and respectable manners,—we have far more need to tell orderly, respectable moral men—"My brother, that thing that you have is worth nothing, as settling your position before God;" than to stand up and thunder about crimes which half of us never heard of, and perhaps only an infinitesimal per-centage of us have ever committed. All sin separates from God, but the thing that makes the separation permanent is not the sin, but the ignorance of the sin. Self-righteousness, ay, and pride of wisdom, they—they have perverted many a nature, many a young man's glowing spirit, and have turned him away from the Gospel. If there be a man here who is looking at the simple message of peace and pardon and purity through Christ, and is saying to himself, Yes; it may fit the common class of minds that require outward signs and symbols, and must pin their faith to forms; but for me with my culture, for me with my spiritual tendencies, for me with my new lights, *I* do not want any objective redemption; *I* do not want anything to convince *me* of a Divine love, and I do not need any crucified Saviour to preach to *me* that God is merciful!—this incident before us has a very solemn lesson in it for him. And if there be a man here who is living a life of surface blamelessness, it has as solemn a lesson for him. Look at the Scribe, and look at the Pharisee—religious men in their way, wise men in their way, decent and respectable men in their way;

and look at that poor thief that had been caught in the wilderness amongst the caves and dens, and had been brought red-handed with blood upon his sword, and guilt in his heart, and nailed up there in the short and summary process of a Roman jurisprudence; — and think that Scribe, and Pharisee, and Priest, saw nothing in Christ; and that the poor profligate wretch saw this in Him,—innocence that showed heavenly against *his* diabolical blackness; and his heart stirred, and he laid hold of Him in the stress of his mighty agony—as a drowning man catches at anything that protrudes from the bank; and he held and shook it, and the thing was fast, and he was safe! Not transgression shuts a man out from mercy. Transgression, which belongs to us all, makes us subjects for the mercy; but it is pride, self-righteousness, trust in ourselves, which "bars the gates of mercy on mankind;" and the men that *are* condemned are condemned not only because they have transgressed the commandments of God, but "*this* is the condemnation, that light came into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

And then (and but a word) we see here, too, the elements of which acceptable faith consists. One does not exactly know by what steps or through what process this poor dying thief passed, which issued in faith—whether it was an impression from Christ's presence, whether it was that he had ever heard anything about Him before, or whether it was only that the wisdom which dwells with death was beginning to clear his eyes as life ebbed away. But however he *came* to the convic-

tion, mark what it was that he believed and expressed,—I am a sinful man; all punishment that comes down upon me is richly deserved: This man is pure and righteous; "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom!" That is all—that is all. That is the thing that saves a man. How much he *did* know—whether he knew all the depth of what he was saying, when he said, "Lord!" is a question that we cannot answer; whether he understood what the "kingdom" was that he was expecting, is a question that we cannot solve; but this is clear—the intellectual part of faith may be dark and doubtful, but the moral and emotional part of it is manifest and plain. There was, *I* am nothing—*Thou* art everything: I bring myself and my emptiness unto Thy great fulness: fill it and make me blessed! Faith has that. Faith has in it repentance—repentance has in it faith too. Faith has in it the recognition of the certainty and the justice of a judgment that is coming down crashing upon every human head; and then from the midst of these fears, and sorrows, and the tempest of that great darkness, there rises up in the night of terrors, the shining of one perhaps pale, quivering, distant, but divinely given hope, "My Saviour! My Saviour! He is righteous: He has died—He lives! I will stay no longer; I will cast myself upon Him!"

Once more,—this incident reminds us not only of the attractive power of the cross, but of the prophetic power of the cross. We have here THE CROSS AS POINTING TO AND FORETELLING THE KINGDOM. Pointing out, and foretelling: that is to say, of course, and only, if we accept the scriptural statement of what these

sufferings were, the Person that endured them, and the meaning of their being endured. But the only thing I would dwell upon here, is, that when we think of Christ as dying for us, we are never to separate it from that other solemn and future coming of which this poor robber catches a glimpse. They crowned Him with thorns, and they gave Him a reed for His sceptre. That mockery, so natural to the strong practical Romans in dealing with one whom they thought a harmless enthusiast, was a symbol which they who did it little dreamed of. The crown of thorns proclaims a sovereignty founded on sufferings. The sceptre of feeble reed speaks of power wielded in gentleness. The cross leads to the crown. The brow that was pierced by the sharp acanthus wreath, therefore wears the diadem of the universe. The hand that passively held the mockery of the worthless, pithless reed, therefore rules the princes of the earth with the rod of iron. He who was lifted up to the cross, was, by that very act, lifted up to be a Ruler and Commander to the peoples. For the death of the cross God hath highly exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour. The way to glory for Him, the power by which He wields the kingdom of the world, is precisely through the suffering. And therefore whensoever there arises before us the image of the one, oh! let there rise before us likewise the image of the other. The cross links on to the kingdom—the kingdom lights up the cross! My brother, the Saviour comes—the Saviour comes a king! The Saviour that comes a king is the Saviour that has been here and was crucified. The kingdom that He establishes, is all full of blessing, and love, and gentle-

ness; and to us (if we will unite the thoughts of cross and crown) there is opened up not only the possibility of having boldness before Him in the day of judgment, but there is opened up this likewise—the certainty that He "shall receive of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." Oh, remember that as certain as the historical fact,—He died on Calvary; so certain is the prophetic fact,—He shall reign, and you and I will stand *there!* I durst not touch that subject. Take it into your own hearts; and think about it—a kingdom, a judgment-seat, a crown, a gathered universe; separation, decision, execution of the sentence. And oh! ask yourselves, "When that gentle eye, with lightning in its depths, falls upon *me*, individualizes *me*, summons out *me* to its bar,—how shall I stand?" "Herein is *our love* made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment." "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

Finally. Here is THE CROSS AS REVEALING AND OPENING THE TRUE PARADISE.—"This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." We have no concern at present with the many subtle inferences as to the state of the dead, and as to the condition of our Lord's human spirit before the resurrection, which have been drawn from these words. To me they do seem fairly to bear the broad and single conclusion that the spirits of the saved do enter at death into a state of conscious presence with their Saviour, and therefore of joy and felicity. But beyond this we have no firm ground for going. It is of more practical worth to note: *the penitent's vague prayer is answered, and over-answered.* He asks, "When Thou

comest"—whensoever that may be—"remember me." I shall stand afar off; do not let me be utterly forgotten. Christ answers—Remember thee! thou shalt be *with Me*, close to My side. Remember thee *when* I come!—*this day* shalt thou be with Me.

And what a contrast that is—the conscious blessedness rushing in close upon the heels of the momentary darkness of death. At the one moment there hangs the thief writhing in mortal agony; the wild shouts of the fierce mob at his feet are growing faint upon his ear; the city spread out at his feet, and all the familiar sights of earth are growing dim to his filmy eye. The soldier's spear comes, the legs are broken, and in an instant there hangs a relaxed corpse; and the spirit, the spirit—is where? Ah! how far away; released from all its sin and its sore agony, struggling up at once into such strange divine enlargement, a new star swimming into the firmament of heaven, a new face before the throne of God, another sinner redeemed from earth! The conscious immediate blessedness of the departed—be he what he may, be his life whatsoever it may have been—who at last, dark, sinful, standing with one foot on the verge of eternity, and poising himself for the flight, flings himself into the arms of Christ—the everlasting blessedness, the Christ-presence and the Christ-gladness, that is the message that the robber leaves to us from his cross. Paradise is opened to us again. The cross is the true "tree of life." The flaming cherubim, and the sword that turneth every way, are gone, and the broad road into the city, the Paradise of God, with all its beauties and all its peaceful joy—a better Paradise, "a statelier Eden,"

than that which we have lost, is flung open to us for ever.

Do not trust a death-bed repentance, my brother. I have stood by many a death-bed, and few indeed have they been where I could have believed that the man was in a condition physically (to say nothing of anything else) clearly to see and grasp the message of the Gospel. There is no limit to the mercy. I know that God's mercy is boundless. I know that "whilst there is life there is hope." I know that a man, going—swept down that great Niagara,—if, before his little skiff tilts over into the awful rapids, he can make one great bound with all his strength, and reach the solid ground—I know he *may be* saved. It is an awful risk to run. A moment's miscalculation, and skiff and voyager alike are whelming in the green chaos below, and come up mangled into nothing, far away down yonder upon the white turbulent foam. "*One* was saved upon the cross," as the old divines used to tell us, "that none might despair; and only one, that none might presume." "*Now* is the accepted time, and *now* is the day of salvation!"

FAITH IN CHRIST.

Acts xxvi. 18.

Faith that is in me.

It is commonly said, and so far as the fact is concerned is said truly, that what are called the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity are rather found in the Epistles than in the Gospels. If we wish the clearest statements of the nature and person of Christ, we turn to Paul's Epistle to the Colossians. If we wish the fullest dissertation upon Christ's work as a sacrifice, we go to the Epistle to the Hebrews. If we seek to prove that men are justified by faith, and not by works, it is to the Epistles to Romans and Galatians that we betake ourselves,—to the writings of the servant rather than the words of the Master. Now this fuller development of Christian doctrine contained in the teaching of the Apostles cannot be denied, and need not be wondered at. The reasons for it I am not going to enter upon at present; they are not far to seek. Christ came not to *speak* the Gospel, but *to be* the Gospel. But then, this truth of a fuller development is often over-strained, as if

Christ "spake nothing concerning priesthood," sacrifices, faith. He *did* so speak when on earth. It is often misused by being made the foundation of an inference unfavourable to the authority of the Apostolic teaching, when we are told, as we sometimes are, that not Paul but Jesus speaks the words which we are to receive.

Here we have Christ himself speaking from the heavens to Paul at the very beginning of the Apostle's course, and if anybody asks us where did Paul get the doctrines which he preached, the answer is, Here, on the road to Damascus, when blind, bleeding, stunned, with all his self-confidence driven out of him—with all that he had been crushed into shivers—he saw his Lord, and heard Him speak. These words spoken then are the germ of all Paul's epistles, the key-note to which all his writings are but the melody that follows, the mighty voice of which all his teaching is but the prolonged echo. "Delivering thee," says Christ to him, "from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in Me." Now, I ask you, what of Paul's Gospel is not here? Man's ruin, man's depravity, the state of darkness, the power of Satan, the sole redemptive work of Christ, justification by belief in that, sanctification coming with justification; and glory, and rest, and heaven at last—there they all are in the very first words that sounded upon the quickened ear of the blinded man when he turned from darkness to light.

It would be foolish, of course, to try to exhaust such a passage as this in a sermon. But notice, what a complete summary of Christian truth there lies in that one last clause of the verse, "Inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me." Translate that into distinct propositions, and they are these: Faith refers to Christ; that is the first thing. Holiness depends on faith; that is the next: "*sanctified* by faith." Heaven depends on holiness; that is the last: "*inheritance* among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me." The whole Gospel!

To the one part of this comprehensive summary which is contained in my text I desire to turn now, in hope of gathering from it some truths as to that familiar word "faith" which may be of use to us all. The expression is so often on our lips that it has come to be almost meaningless in many minds. These key-words of Scripture meet the same fate as do coins that have been long in circulation. They pass through so many fingers that the inscriptions get worn off them. We can all talk about faith and forgiveness and justifying and sanctifying, but how few of us have definite notions about what these words that come so easily from our lips mean. There is a vast deal of cloudy haze in the minds of average church and chapel goers as to what this wonder-working faith may really be. Perhaps we may then be able to see large and needful truths gleaming in these weighty syllables which Christ Jesus spoke from heaven to Paul, "faith that is in Me."

In the first place, then, THE OBJECT OF FAITH IS CHRIST. "Faith that is in Me," which is directed

towards Christ as its object. Christianity is not merely a system of truths about God, nor a code of morality deducible from these. In its character of a revelation, it is the revelation of God in the person of His Son. Christianity in the soul is not the belief of these truths about God, still less the acceptance and practice of these pure ethics, but the affiance and the confidence of the whole spirit fixed upon the redeeming, revealing Christ.

True, the object of our faith is Christ as made known to us in the facts of His recorded life and the teaching of His Apostles. True, our only means of knowing Him or any other person whom we have never seen, is the descriptions of Him, His character and work, which are given. True, the empty name Christ has to be filled with the doctrinal and biographical statements of Scripture before the Person on whom faith is to fix can be apprehended or beheld. True, it is Christ as He is made known to us in the word of God, the Incarnate Son, the perfect man, the atoning sacrifice, the risen Lord, the ascended Intercessor in whom we have to trust. The characteristics and attributes of Christ are known to us only by doctrinal propositions and by biographical statements. These must be understood in some measure and accepted, ere there can be faith in Him. Apart from them the image of Christ must stand a pale colourless phantom before the mind, and the faith which is directed towards such a nebula will be an unintelligent emotion, as nebulous and impotent as the shadow towards which it turns.

Thus far, then, the attempt which is sometimes made to establish a Christianity without doctrines on the plea

that the object of faith is not a proposition, but a person, must be regarded as nugatory; for how can the "person" be an object of thought at all, but through the despised "propositions"?

But while on the one hand it is true that Christ as revealed in these doctrinal statements of Scripture, the divine human Saviour, is the object of faith, on the other hand it is to be remembered that it is He, and not the statements about Him, who is the object.

Look at His own words. He does not merely say to us, Believe this, that, and the other thing about Me; put your credence in this and the other doctrine; accept this and the other promise; hope for this and the other future thing. All these come with but are not the central act. He says, "Believe: believe in Me! '*I* am the way, and the truth, and the life:' He that cometh to *Me* shall never hunger, and he that believeth in *Me* shall never thirst." Do we rightly appreciate that? I think that if people rightly grasped this truth, it would clear away rolling wreaths of fog and mist from their perceptions of the Gospel—that Christ is *it*, and that the object of faith is not simply the truths that are recorded here in the word, but He with regard to whom these truths are recorded. The whole feeling and attitude of a man's mind is different, according as he is trusting a person, or according as he is believing something about a person. And this, therefore, is the first broad truth that lies here Faith has reference not merely to a doctrine, not to a system; but deeper than all these, to a living Lord—"faith that is *in Me*."

I cannot help observing, as I go along—though it may be somewhat of a digression—what a strong inference

with regard to the divinity of Christ is deducible from this first thought that He is the object to which faith has reference. If you look into the Old Testament, you will find constantly, "Trust ye in the Lord for ever;" "Put thy trust in Jehovah!" There, too, though under the form of a law, there, too, faith was the seed and germ of all religion. There, too, though under the hard husk of apparently external obedience and ceremonial sacrifices, the just lived by faith. The object was the Jehovah of that ancient covenant. Religion has always been the same in every dispensation. At every time, that which made a man a devout man has been identically the same thing. It has always been true that it has been faith which has bound man to God, and given man hope. But when we come to the New Testament, the centre is shifted, as it would seem. What has become of the grand old words, "Trust ye in the Lord Jehovah"? Look! Christ stands there, and says, "Believe upon Me!" With calm, simple, profound dignity, He lays His hand upon all the ancient and consecrated words, upon all the ancient and hallowed emotions that used to set to the unseen God between the cherubim, throned above judgment and resting upon mercy; and He says, They are Mine—give them to Me! That ancient trust, I claim the right to have it. That old obedience, it belongs to Me. I am He to whom in all time the loving hearts of them that loved God, have set. I am the Angel of the Covenant, in whom whoever trusteth shall never be confounded! And I ask you just to take that one simple fact, that Christ thus steps, in the New Testament—in so far as the direction of the religious emotions of faith and love is

concerned—that Christ steps into the place filled by the Jehovah of the Old; and ask yourselves honestly what theory about Christ's nature and person and work explains that fact, and saves Him from the charge of folly and blasphemy? "He that believeth upon Me shall never hunger." Ah, my brother! He was no mere *man* who said that. He that spake from out of the cloud to the Apostle on the road to Damascus, and said, "Sanctified by faith that is in Me," was no mere *man*. Christ was our brother and a man, but He was the Son of God, the Divine Redeemer. The object of faith is Christ; and as object of faith He must needs be Divine.

And now, secondly, closely connected with and springing from this thought as to the true object of faith arises the consideration as to THE NATURE AND THE ESSENCE OF THE ACT OF FAITH ITSELF. *Whom* we are to trust in we have seen: what it is to *have* faith may be very briefly stated. If the object of faith were certain truths, the assent of the understanding would be enough If the object of faith were unseen things, the confident persuasion of them would be sufficient. If the object of faith were promises of future good, the hope rising to certainty of the possession of these would be sufficient. But if the object be more than truths, more than unseen realities, more than promises; if the object be a living Person,—then there follows inseparably this, that faith is not merely the assent of the understanding, that faith is not merely the persuasion of the reality of unseen things, that faith is not merely the confident expectation of future good; but that faith is the personal relation of him that believes to the living Person its object,—the

relation which is expressed not more clearly, but perhaps a little more forcibly to us by substituting another word, and saying, Faith is *trust.*

And I think that there again, by laying hold of that simple principle, Because Christ is the object of Faith, therefore Faith must be trust, we get bright and beautiful light upon the grandest truths of the Gospel of God. If we will only take that as our explanation, we have not indeed defined faith by substituting the other word for it, but we have made it a little more clear to our apprehensions by using a non-theological word with which our daily acts teach us to connect an intelligible meaning. If we will only take that as our explanation, how simple, how grand, how familiar too it sounds,—to *trust* Him! It is the very same kind of feeling, though different in degree, and glorified by the majesty and glory of its object, as that which we all know how to put forth in our relations with one other. We trust each other. That is faith. We have confidence in the love that has been around us, breathing benedictions and bringing blessings ever since we were little children. When the child looks up into the mother's face, the symbol to it of all protection; or into the father's eye, the symbol to it of all authority,—that emotion by which the little one hangs upon the loving hand and trusts the loving heart that towers above it in order to bend over it and scatter good, is the same as the one which, glorified and made divine, rises strong and immortal in its power, when fixed and fastened on Christ, and saves the soul. The Gospel rests upon a mystery, but the practical part of it is no mystery. When we come and preach to you, Trust in

Christ and thou shalt be saved, we are not asking you to put into exercise some mysterious power. We are only asking you to give to Him that which you give to others, to transfer the old emotions, the blessed emotions, the exercise of which make gladness in life here below, to transfer them to Him, and to rest safe in the Lord. Faith is trust. The living Person as its object rises before us there, in His majesty, in His power, in His gentleness; and He says, I shall be contented if thou wilt give to me these emotions which thou dost fix now, to thy death and loss, on the creatures of a day. Faith is mighty, divine, the gift of God; but oh! it is the exercise of a familiar habit, only fixed upon a Divine and eternal Person.

And if this be the very heart and kernel of the Christian doctrine of faith—that it is simple personal trust in Jesus Christ; it is worthy of notice, how all the subsidiary meanings and uses of the word flow out of that, whilst it cannot be explained by any of them. People are in the habit of setting up antitheses betwixt faith and reason, betwixt faith and sight, betwixt faith and possession. They say, "We do not *know*, we must *believe;*" they say, "We do not *see*, we must have faith;" they say, "We do not *possess*, we must trust." Now faith —the trust in Christ—the simple personal relation of confidence in Him—*that* lies beneath all these other meanings of the word. For instance: faith is, in one sense, the opposite and antithesis of sight; because Christ, unseen, having gone into the unseen world, the confidence which is directed towards Him must needs pass out beyond the region of sense, and fix upon the

immortal verities that are veiled by excess of light at God's right hand. Faith is the opposite of sight; inasmuch as Christ, having given us assurance of an unseen and everlasting world, we, trusting in Him, believe what He says to us, and are persuaded and know that there are things yonder which we have never seen with the eye nor handled with the hand. Similarly, faith is the completion of reason; because, trusting Christ, we believe what He says, and He has spoken to us truths which we in ourselves are unable to discover, but which, when revealed, we accept on the faith of His truthfulness, and because we rely upon Him. Similarly, faith is contrasted with present possession, because Christ has promised us future blessings and future glories; and having confidence in the Person, we believe what He says, and know that we shall possess them. But the root from which springs the power of faith as the opposite of sight, the power of faith as the telescope of reason, the power of faith as the confidence of things not possessed, is the deeper thing—faith in the Person, which leads us to believe Him whether He promises, reveals, or commands, and to take His words as verity because He *is* "the truth."

And then, again; if this, the personal trust in Christ as our living Redeemer—if this be faith, then there come also, closely connected with it, certain other emotions or feelings in the heart. For instance, if I am trusting to Christ, there is inseparably linked with it self-distrust. There are two sides to the thought; where there is reliance upon another, there must needs be non-reliance upon self. Take an illustration. There is the tree: the trunk goes upward from the little seed, rises into the

light, gets the sunshine upon it, and has leaves and fruit. That is the upward tendency of faith—trust in Christ. There is the root, down deep, buried, dark, unseen. Both are springing, but springing in opposite directions, from the one seed. That is, as it were, the negative side, the downward tendency—self-distrust. The two things go together—the positive reliance upon another, the negative distrust of myself. There must be deep consciousness not only of my own impotence, but of my own sinfulness. The heart must be emptied that the seed of faith may grow; but the entrance in of faith is itself the means for the emptying of the heart. The two things co-exist; we can divide them in thought. We can wrangle and squabble, as divided sects have done, about which comes first, the fact being, that though you can part them in thought, you cannot part them in experience, inasmuch as they are but the obverse and the reverse, the two sides of the same coin. Faith and repentance—faith and self-distrust—they are done in one and the same indissoluble act. And again, faith, as thus conceived of, will obviously have for its certain and immediate consequence, love. Nay, the two emotions will be inseparable, and practically co-existent. In thought we can separate them. Logically, faith comes first, and love next, but in life they will spring up together. The question of their order of existence is an often-trod battle-ground of theology, all strewed with the relics of former fights. But in the real history of the growth of religious emotions in the soul the interval which separates them is impalpable, and in every act of trust love is present, and fundamental to every emotion of love to Christ is **trust in Christ.**

But without further reference to such matters, here is the broad principle of our text. Trust in Christ, not mere assent to a principle, personal dependence upon Him revealed as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, an act of the will as well as of the understanding, and essentially an act of the will and not of the understanding—that is the thing by which a soul is saved. And much of the mist and confusion about saving faith, and non-saving faith, might be lifted and dispersed if we once fully apprehended and firmly held by the Divine simplicity of the truth, that Faith is trust in Jesus Christ.

Once more: from this general definition there follows, in the third place, an explanation of THE POWER OF FAITH. "We are justified," says the Bible, "by faith." If a man believes, he is saved. Why so? Not as some people sometimes seem to fancy—not as if in faith itself there was any merit. There is a very strange and subtle resurrection of the whole doctrine of works in reference to this matter; and we often hear belief in the Gospel of Christ spoken about as if *it*, the work of the man believing, was, in a certain way and to some extent, that which God rewarded by giving him salvation. What is that but the whole doctrine of works come up again in a new form? What difference is there between what a man does with his hands and what a man feels in his heart? If the one merit salvation, or if the other merit salvation, equally we are shut up to this,—Men get heaven by what they do; and it does not matter a bit what they do it with, whether it be body or soul. When we say we are saved by faith, we mean, accurately, *through*

faith. It is God that saves. It is Christ's life, Christ's blood, Christ's sacrifice, Christ's intercession, that saves. Faith is simply the channel through which there flows over into my emptiness the Divine fulness; or, to use the good old illustration, it is the hand which is held up to receive the benefit which Christ lays in it. A living trust in Jesus has power unto salvation, only because it is the means by which the power of God unto salvation may come into my heart. On that side is the great ocean, Christ's love, Christ's abundance, Christ's merits, Christ's righteousness; or, rather, that which includes them all, there is the great ocean, Christ Himself; and on this is the empty vessel of my soul—and the little narrow pipe that has nothing to do but to bring across the refreshing water—that is the act of faith in Him. There is no merit in the dead lead, no virtue in the mere emotion. It is not faith that saves us; it is Christ that saves us, and saves us through faith.

And now, lastly, these principles likewise help us to understand wherein consists THE GUILT AND CRIMINALITY OF UNBELIEF. People are sometimes disposed to fancy that God has arbitrarily selected this one thing, believing in Jesus Christ, as the means of salvation; and not distinctly to see why and how non-belief is so desperate and criminal a thing. I think that the principles that I have been trying feebly to work out now, help us to see how faith is not arbitrarily selected as the instrument and means of our salvation. There is no other way of effecting it. God could not do it in any other way than that, the fulness being provided, the condition of receiving it should be trust in His Son. And next they

show where the guilt of unbelief lies. Faith is not first and principally an act of the understanding; it is not the mere assent to certain truths. I believe, for my part, that men are responsible even for their intellectual processes, and for the beliefs which they arrive at by the working of these; and I think it is a very shallow philosophy that stands up and says—(it is almost exploded now, and perhaps not needful to speak about it)—that men are not more "responsible for their belief than they are for the colour of their hair." Why, if it were no more than an intellectual process, it is equally true that they are responsible for that; but faith that saves a man, and unbelief that ruins a man, are not processes of the understanding alone. It is the will, the heart, the whole moral being, that is concerned. Why does a man not trust Jesus Christ? For one reason only: because *he will not*. Why has a man not faith in the Lamb of God? Because his whole nature is turning away from that Divine and loving face, and is setting itself in rebellion against it? Why does a man refuse to believe? Because he has confidence in himself; because he has not a sense of his own sins; because he has not love in his heart to his Lord and Saviour. Unbelief men *are* responsible for. Unbelief is criminal, because it is a moral act—an act of the whole nature. Belief or unbelief is the test of a man's whole spiritual condition, just because it is the whole being, affections, will, conscience, and all, as well as the understanding, which are concerned in it. And therefore Christ, who says, "Sanctified by faith that is in Me," says likewise, "He that believeth not, shall be condemned."

And now, brethren, take this one conviction into your hearts, That what makes a man a Christian—what saves my soul and yours—what brings the love of Christ into my life, and makes the sacrifice of Christ a power to pardon and purify,—that that is not merely believing this Book, not merely understanding the doctrines that are there, but a far more profound thing than that. It is the casting of myself upon Himself, the bending of my willing heart to His loving Spirit; the close contact, heart to heart, soul to soul, will to will, of my emptiness with His fulness, of my sinfulness with His righteousness, of my death with His life: that I may live by Him, be sanctified by Him, be saved by Him "with an everlasting salvation." Faith is trust: Christ is the object of faith. Faith is the condition of salvation; and unbelief is your fault, your loss—the crime which ruins men's souls!

IT IS THE LORD.

St. John xxi. 7.

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.

IT seems a very strange thing that these disciples had not, at an earlier period of this incident, discovered the presence of Christ, inasmuch as the whole was so manifestly a repetition of that former event by which the commencement of their ministry had been signalized, when He called them to become "fishers of men." We are apt to suppose that when once again they embarked on the lake, and went back to their old trade, it must have been with many a thought of Him busy at their hearts. Yonder—perhaps we fancy them thinking—is the very point where we saw Him coming out of the shadows of the mountains, that night when He walked on the water; yonder is the little patch of grass where He made them all sit down whilst we bore the bread to them: there is the very spot where we were mending our nets when He came up to us and called us to Himself;—and now it is all over. We have loved and lost Him; He has been with us, and has left us. "We trusted that

it had been He who should have redeemed Israel," and the cross has ended it all !—So, we are apt to think, they must have spoken; but there does not seem to have been about them any such sentimental remembrance. John takes pains in this narrative, I think, to show them to us as plain, rough men, busy about their night's work, and thinking a great deal more of their want of success in fishing, than about the old associations which we are apt to put into their minds. Then through the darkness He comes, as they had seen Him come once before, and they know Him not; and He speaks to them as He had spoken before, and they do not detect His voice yet; and He repeats the old miracle, and their eyes are all holden, excepting the eyes of him who loved, and *he* first says, "It is the Lord." Now, besides all the other features of this incident by which it becomes the revelation of the Lord's presence with His church, and the exhibition of the work of the church during all the course of the world's history, it contains valuable lessons on other points, such as these which I shall try to bring before you.

Now and always, as in that morning twilight on the Galilean lake, Christ comes to men. Everywhere He is present, everywhere revealing Himself. Now, as then, our eyes are holden by our own fault, so that we recognise not the merciful Presence which is all around us. Now, as then, it is they who are nearest to Christ by love who see Him first. Now, as then, they who are nearest to Him by love, are so because He loves them, and because they know and believe the love which He has to them. I find, then, in this part of the story three thoughts,—

First, They only see aright who see Christ in everything. Secondly, They only see Christ who love Him. Lastly, They only love Him who know that He loves them.

First then, THEY ONLY SEE ARIGHT WHO SEE CHRIST IN EVERYTHING. This word of John's, "It is the Lord" —ought to be the conviction with the light of which we go out to the examination of all events, and to the consideration of all the circumstances of our daily life. We believe that unto Christ is given all power in heaven and upon earth. We believe that to Him belongs creative power—that "without Him was not anything made which was made." We believe that from Him came all life at first. In Him life was, as in its deep source. He is the fountain of life. We believe that as no being comes into existence without His creative power, so none continues to exist without His sustaining energy. We believe that He allots to all men their natural characters and their circumstances. We believe that the history of the world is but the history of His influence, and that the centre of the whole universe is the cross of Calvary. In the light of such convictions, I take it, every man that calls himself a Christian ought to go out to meet life and to study all events. Let me try, then, to put before you, very briefly, one or two of the provinces in which we are to take this conviction as the key-note to all our knowledge.

No man will understand the *world* aright, to begin with, who cannot say about all creation, "It is the Lord." Nature is but the veil of the invisible and ascended Lord: and if we would pierce to the deepest foundations of all Being, we cannot stop until we get down to the living Power of Christ our Saviour and the Creator of the

world, by whom all things were made, and whose will pouring out into this great universe, is the sustaining principle and the true force which keeps it from nothingness and from quick decay.

Why, what did Christ work all His miracles upon earth for? Not solely to give us a testimony that the Father had sent Him; not solely to make us listen to His words as a Teacher sent from God; not solely as proof of His Messiahship,—but besides all these purposes there was surely this other, that for once He would unveil to us the true author of all things, and the true foundation of all being. Christ's miracles interrupted the order of the world, because they made visible to men for once the true and constant Orderer of the order. They interrupted the order in so far as they struck out the intervening means by which the creative and sustaining word of God acts in nature, and suspended each event directly from the firm staple of His will. They revealed the eternal Orderer of that order in that they *showed* the Incarnate Word wielding the forces of nature, which He has done from of old and still does. We are then to take all these signs and wonders that He wrought, as a perennial revelation of the real state of things with regard to this natural world, and to see in them all, signs and tokens that into every corner and far-off region of the universe His loving hand reaches, and His sustaining power goes forth. Into what province of nature did He not go? He claimed to be the Lord of life by the side of the boy's bier at the gate of Nain, in the chamber of the daughter of Jairus, by the grave of Lazarus. He asserted for Himself authority over all the powers and functions of

our bodily life, when He gave eyes to the blind, hearing to the deaf, feet to the lame. He showed that He was Lord over the fowl of the air, the beasts of the earth, the fish of the sea. And He asserted His dominion over inanimate nature, when the fig-tree, cursed by Him, withered away to its roots, and the winds and waves sunk into silence at His gentle voice. He let us get a glimpse into the dark regions of His rule over the unseen, when "with authority He commanded the unclean spirits, and they came out." And all these things He did, in order that we, walking in this fair world, encompassed by the glories of this wonderful universe, should be delivered from the temptation of thinking that it is separated from Him, or independent of His creative and sustaining power; and in order that we should feel that the continuance of all which surrounds us, the glories of heaven and the loveliness of earth, are as truly owing to the constant intervention of His present will, and the interposition beneath them of His sustaining hand, as when first, by the "Word of God" who "was with God and who was God," speaking forth His fiat, there came light and beauty out of darkness and chaos.

Oh, Christian men! we shall never understand the Christian thought about God's universe, until we are able to say, Preservation is a continual creation; and beneath all the ordinary workings of Nature, as we faithlessly call it, and the apparently dead play of secondary causes, there are welling forth, and energizing, the living love and the blessed power of Christ, the Maker, and Monarch, and Sustainer of all. "It is the Lord," is the highest teaching of all science. The mystery of the

universe, and the meaning of God's world, are shrouded in hopeless obscurity, until we learn to feel that all laws suppose a lawgiver, and that all working involves a Divine energy; and that beneath all which appears there lies for ever rising up through it and giving it its life and power, the one true living Being, the Father in heaven, the Son by whom He works, and the Holy Ghost the Spirit. Darkness lies on Nature, except to those who in

> "the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky"

see that form which these disciples saw in the morning twilight. Let "It is the Lord," be the word on our lips as we gaze on them all, and nature will then be indeed to us the open secret, the secret of the Lord which "He will show to them that fear Him."

Then again, the same conviction is the only one that is adequate either to explain or to make tolerable *the circumstances of our earthly condition.* To most men—ah! to all of us in our faithless times—the events that befal ourselves, seem to be one of two things equally horrible, the play of a blind Chance, or the work of an iron Fate. I know not which of these two ghastly thoughts about the circumstances of life is the more depressing, ruining all our energy, depriving us of all our joy, and dragging us down with its weight. But, brethren, and friends, there are but these three ways of it,—either our life is the subject of a mere chaotic chance; or else it is put into the mill of an iron

destiny, which goes grinding on and crushing with its remorseless wheels, regardless of what it grinds up; or else, through it all, in it all, beneath it and above it all, there is the Will which is Love, and the Love which is Christ! Which of these thoughts is the one that commends itself to your own hearts and consciences, and which is the one under which you would fain live if you could? I understand not how a man can front the awful possibilities of a future on earth, knowing all the points at which he is vulnerable, and all the ways by which disaster may come down upon him, and retain his sanity, except he believes that all is ruled, not merely by a God far above him, who may be as unsympathising as He is omnipotent, but by his elder Brother, the Son of God, who showed His heart by all His dealings with us here below, and who loves as tenderly, and sympathizes as closely with us as ever He did when on earth He gathered the weary and the sick around Him. Is it not a thing, men and women, worth having, to have this for the settled conviction of your hearts, that Christ is moving all the pulses of your life, and that nothing falls out without the intervention of His presence and the power of His will working through it? Do you not think such a belief would nerve you for difficulty, would lift you buoyantly over trials and depressions, and would set you upon a vantage ground high above all the petty annoyances of life? Tell me, is there any other place where a man can plant his foot and say, Now I am on a rock and I care not what comes? The riddle of Providence is solved, and the discipline of Providence is being accomplished, when we have grasped this convic-

tion,—All events do serve me, for all circumstances come from His will and pleasure, which is love; and everywhere where I go—be it in the darkness of disaster or in the sunshine of prosperity—I shall see standing before me that familiar and beloved shape, and shall be able to say, "It is the Lord." Friends and brethren, that is the faith to live by, that is the faith to die by; and without it life is a mockery and a misery.

Once more this same conviction, "It is the Lord," should guide us in all our thoughts about the *history* and destinies of *mankind and of Christ's Church.* The cross is the centre of the world's history, the incarnation of Christ and the crucifixion of our Lord are the pivot round which all the events of the ages revolve. The testimony of Jesus was the spirit of prophecy, and the growing power of Jesus is the spirit of history. And in every book that calls itself the history of a nation, unless there be written, whether literally or in spirit, this for its motto, "It is the Lord," all will be shallow and incomplete.

"They that went before and they that came after," when He entered into the holy city in His brief moment of acceptance and pomp, surrounded Him with hosannas and jubilant gladness. It is a deep and true symbol of the whole history of the world. All the generations that went before Him, though they knew it not, were preparing the way of the Lord, and heralding the advent of Him who was the desire of all nations and the light of men; and all the generations that come after, though they know it not, are swelling the pomp of His triumph and hastening the time of His crowning and dominion.

"It is the Lord," is the meaning of all national existence. It is the secret of all the events of the world. The tangled web of human history is only then intelligible when that is taken as its clue, "From Him are all things, and to Him are all things." The ocean from which the stream of history flows, and that into which it empties itself, are one. He began it, He sustains it. "The help that is done upon earth He doeth it Himself," and when all is finished, it will be found that all things have indeed come from Christ, been sustained and directed by Christ, and have tended to the glory and exaltation of that Redeemer, who is King of kings and Lord of lords, Maker of the worlds, and before whose throne are for ever gathered for service, whether they know it or not, the forces of the Gentiles, the riches of the nations, the events of history, the fates and destinies of every man.

I need not dwell upon the way in which such a conviction as this, my friends, living and working in our hearts, would change for us the whole aspect of life, and make everything bright and beautiful, blessed and calm, strengthening us for all which we might have to do, nerving us for duty, and sustaining us against every trial, leading us on, triumphant and glad, through regions all sparkling with tokens of His presence and signs of His love, unto His throne at last, to lay down our praises and our crowns before Him. Only let me leave with you this one word of earnest entreaty, that you will lay to heart the solemn alternative—either see Christ in everything, and be blessed; or miss Him, and be miserable. Oh, it is a waste, weary world, unless it be filled with signs of His presence. It is a dreary seventy years,

brother, of pilgrimage and strife, unless, as you travel along the road, you see the marks that He who went before you has left by the wayside for your guidance and your sustenance. If you want your days to be true, noble, holy, happy, manly, and Godlike, believe us, it is only when they all have flowing through them this conviction, "It is the Lord," that they all become so.

Then, secondly, ONLY THEY WHO LOVE, SEE CHRIST. John, the apostle of Love, knew Him first. In religious matters, love is the foundation of knowledge. There is no way of knowing a Person except love. The knowledge of God and the knowledge of Christ are not to be won by the exercise of the understanding. A man cannot argue his way into knowing Christ. No skill in drawing inferences will avail him there. The treasures of wisdom—earthly wisdom—are all powerless in that region. Man's understanding and natural capacity—let it keep itself within its own limits and region, and it is strong and good; but in the region of acquaintance with God and Christ, the wisdom of this world is foolishness, and man's understanding is not the organ by which he can know Christ. Oh no: there is a better way than that: "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love." As it is, in feebler measure, with regard to our personal acquaintance with one another, where it is not so much the power of the understanding, or the quickness of the perception, or the talent and genius of a man, that make the foundation of his knowledge of his friend, as the force of his sympathy and the depth of his affection; so—with the necessary modification arising from the transference from earthly acquaintance to the great

Friend and Lover of our souls in heaven—so is it with regard to our knowledge of Christ. Love will trace Him everywhere, as dear friends can detect each other in little marks which are meaningless to others. Love's quick eye pierces through disguises impenetrable to a colder scrutiny. Love has in it a longing for His presence which makes us eager and quick to mark the lightest sign that He for whom it longs is near, as the footstep of some dear one is heard by the sharp ear of affection long before any sound breaks the silence to those around. Love leads to likeness to the Lord, and that likeness makes the clearer vision of the Lord possible. Love to Him strips from our eyes the film that self and sin, sense and custom, have drawn over them. It is these which hide Him from us. It is because men are so indifferent to, so forgetful of, their best friend that they fail to behold Him. "It is the Lord" is written large and plain on all things, but like the great letters on a map, they are so obvious and fill so wide a space, that they are not seen. They who love Him know Him, and they who know Him love Him. The true eye-salve for our blinded eyes is applied when we have turned with our hearts to Christ. The simple might of faithful love opens them to behold a more glorious vision than the mountain full of chariots of fire, which once flamed before the prophet's servant of old—even the august and ever-present form of the Lord of life, the Lord of history, the Lord of providence. When they who love Jesus turn to see the voice that speaks with them, they ever behold the Son of man in His glory; and where others see but the dim beach and

a mysterious stranger, it is to their lips that the glad cry first comes, "It is the Lord."

And is it not a blessed thing, brethren, that thus this high and glorious prerogative of recognising the marks of Christ's presence everywhere, of going through life gladdened by the assurance of His nearness, does not depend on what belongs to few men only, but on what may belong to all? When we say that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called,"—when we say that love is the means of knowledge,—we are but in other words saying that the way is open to all, and that no characteristics belonging to classes, no powers that must obviously always belong to but a handful, are necessary for the full apprehension of the power and blessedness of Christ's Gospel. The freeness and the fulness of that Divine message, the glorious truth that it is for all men, and is offered to all, are couched in that grand principle, Love that thou mayest know; love, and thou art filled with the fulness of God. Not for the handful, not for the *élite* of the world; not for the few, but for the many; not for the wise, but for all; not for classes, but for humanity—for all that are weak, and sinful, and needy, and foolish, and darkened, He comes, who only needs that the heart that looks should love, and then it shall behold!

But if that were the whole that I have to say, I should have said but little to the purpose. It very little avails to tell men to love. We cannot love by commandment, or because we think it duty. There is but one way of loving, and that is to see the lovely. The disciple who loved Jesus was "the disciple *whom Jesus loved*." Generalize

that, and it teaches us this, that THEY LOVE WHO KNOW THAT CHRIST LOVES THEM. His Divine and eternal mercy is the foundation of the whole thing. Our love, brethren, can never be anything else than the echo to His voice of tenderness, than the reflected light upon our hearts of the full glory of His affection. No man loveth God except the man who has first learned that God loves him. "We love Him, because He first loved us." And when we say, Love Christ, if we could not go on to say, Nay, rather, let Christ's love come down upon you—we had said worse than nothing. The fountain that rises in my heart can only spring up heavenward, because the water of it flowed down into my heart from the higher level. All love must descend first, before it can ascend. We have, then, no Gospel to preach, if we have only this to preach, Love, and thou art saved. But we have a Gospel that is worth the preaching, when we can come to men with no love in their hearts, and say, Brethren, listen to this—you have to bring nothing, you are called upon to originate no affection; you have nothing to do but simply to receive the everlasting love of God in Christ His Son, which was without you, which began before you, which flows forth independent of you, which is unchecked by all our sins, which triumphs over all our transgressions, and which will make us—loveless, selfish, hardened, sinful men—soft, and tender, and full of Divine affection, by the communication of its own self.

Oh, then, look to Christ, that you may love Him! Think, brethren, of that full, and free, and boundless mercy which, from eternity, has been pouring itself out

in floods of grace and loving-kindness over all creatures! Think of that everlasting love which presided at the foundation of the earth, and has sustained it ever since! Think of that Saviour who has died for us, and lives for us! Think of Christ, the heart of God, and the fulness of the Father's mercy; and do not think of yourselves at all! Do not ask yourselves, to begin with, the question, Do I love Him or do I not? You will never love by that means. If a man is cold, let him go to the fire and warm himself. If he is dark, let him stand in the sunshine, and he will be light. If his heart is all clogged and clotted with sin and selfishness, let him get under the influence of the love of Christ, and look away from himself and his own feelings, towards that Saviour whose love shed abroad is the sole means of kindling ours. You have to go down deeper than *your* feelings, *your* affections, *your* desires, *your* character. There you will find no resting-place, no consolation, no power. Dig down to the living rock, Christ and His infinite love to you, and let *it* be the strong foundation, built into which you and your love may become living stones, a holy temple, partaking of the firmness and nature of that on which it rests. They that love do it because they know that Christ loves them; and they that love see Him everywhere; and they that see Him everywhere are blessed for evermore. And let no man here torture himself, or limit the fulness of this message that we preach, by questionings whether Christ loves him or not. Are you a man? are you sinful? have you broken God's law? do you need a Saviour? Then put away all these questions, and believe that Christ's personal love is streaming out

for the whole world, and there is a share for you if you like to take it and be blessed!

There is one last thought arising from the whole subject before us, that may be worth mention before I close. Did you ever notice how this whole incident might be turned, by a symbolical application, to the hour of death, and the vision which may meet us when we come thither? It admits of the application, and perhaps was intended to receive the application, of such a symbolic reference. The morning is dawning, the gray of night going away, the lake is still; and yonder, standing on the shore, in the uncertain light, there is one dim figure, and one disciple catches a sight of Him, and another casts himself into the water, and they find a fire of coals, and fish laid thereon, and bread, and Christ gathers them around His table, and they all know that "It is the Lord." It is what the death of the Christian man, who has gone through life recognising Christ everywhere, may well become:—the morning dawning, and the finished work, and the figure standing on the quiet beach, so that the last plunge into the cold flood that yet separates us, will not be taken with trembling reluctance; but, drawn to Him by the love beaming out of His face, and upheld by the power of His beckoning presence, we shall struggle through the latest wave that parts us, and scarcely feel its chill, nor know that we *have* crossed it; till falling blessed at His feet, we see, by the nearer and clearer vision of His face, that this is indeed heaven. And looking back upon "the sea that brought us thither," we shall behold its waters flashing in the light of that everlasting morning, and hear them breaking into music upon the eternal

shore. And then, brethren, when all the weary night-watchers on the stormy ocean of life are gathered together around Him who watched with them from His throne on the bordering mountains of eternity, where the day shines for ever—then He will seat them at His table in His kingdom, and none will need to ask, "Who art thou?" or, "Where am I?" for all shall know that "it is the Lord," and the full, perfect, unchangeable vision of His blessed face will be heaven!

LOVE AND FEAR.

1 St. John iv. 18.

Perfect love casteth out fear.

WE are accustomed to speak of the Apostle John as being the Apostle of love, and to fancy that that means that he was gentle, and sometimes almost weak. He was the Apostle of love, he was gentle; but it is worthy of notice that it is his epistles in which there comes out most broadly, most sternly, the principle that all mankind are divided into two great classes,—the one, those that are of God; and the other, those that are of the world and the devil. That is *his* love. Whatever is not light is darkness. Whatever is not life is death. Whatever is not God is Satan. He has no idea of some on the one side and some on the other, and a great neutral-tinted mass in the centre that belong to neither. The contrast embraces all classes and conditions. Every man is one thing or the other—God's or Satan's! And here is one form of the contrast. There are only two motives, he says, that rule men in regard to God—only two emotions, either love or fear. There is nothing between the two. Love, and liberty, and joy, are on the one side; fear, based upon and leading to hate, and

issuing in torment, on the other. The two spheres are mutually exclusive, they do not cross each other, or touch each other, at any portion of their circumference. The text, then, suggests, in the first place, the universal dominion of fear; secondly, the fearlessness of love; and then, in order to prevent misunderstanding, lastly, the reverence of love, "Perfect love *casteth out fear*," perfect love *heightens reverence*, and *deepens self-distrust.*

In the first place, then, the Apostle here contemplates A UNIVERSAL DOMINION OF FEAR, wherever there is not the presence of active love. Of course, he is speaking about the emotions which men cherish with regard to God. It is not fear and love generally that he is talking about, but it is the relation in which we stand to our Father in heaven; and of that he says universally, Those that do not love Him, fear Him. Is that true? It is not difficult, I think, to establish it.

If you will consider for a moment, you will see that this universal dominion of fear which is here contemplated, and asserted as a fact, rests on a universal consciousness of sin. All men everywhere have some more or less faint or clear conviction of the existence of a God. All men everywhere have some more or less active or torpid working of conscience. "'Tis conscience that makes cowards"—cowards of whom?—"*of us all*," said the dramatist. Blend together these two things, the conviction of the existence of a great unseen and awful Power which has some relations of authority over us, and the conviction "I am a sinful man," and take into account that the fact of sin necessarily brings about much ignorance of the true character of Him

whom the consciousness of sin arrays in awful attributes of holiness and justice; and there follows inevitably, universally, though not always with equal strength and prominence, this feeling towards God, I knew Thee that Thou wert austere, and I was afraid.

Well, then, consider further, that the truth of this representation of the universal dominion of fear is not made in the least degree doubtful by the fact that the ordinary condition of men is not one of active dread of God. There is nothing more striking than the power that we have of forcing ourselves to forget, because we know that it is dangerous to remember—that strange power that a man has of refusing to think of a subject because he knows that to think of it would be torture and terror. One of our poets gives a grim picture of a traveller on a lonesome road, who has caught a glimpse of a frightful shape close behind him,

> "And having once turned round walks on,
> And turns no more his head."

The dreadful thing is there on his very heels, its breath hot on his cheek, he feels it though he does not see, but he dare not face round to it, he puts a strong compulsion on himself, and with rigidly fixed face, strides on his way, a sickening horror busy with his heart. An awful image that, but a true one with regard to what many men do with their thoughts of God! They know that that thought is there, close behind them. They feel sometimes as if its hand were just coming out to be laid on their shoulders, and to stop them. And they will not turn their heads to see the Face that should be the love,

the blessedness, the life of their spirits, but is—because they love it not—the terror and freezing dread of their souls.

This fear, which springs from the conviction of God as righteous, and the consciousness of individual sinfulness, varies in energy with the varying strength of these two convictions, and it assumes various forms. Sometimes it appears as a straining after forgetfulness of Him: "*I will not* think of Him!" That is fear wearing the mask of godlessness. Sometimes it assumes the very opposite shape, and becomes the underlying basis of vast and complicated systems of rigorous, joyless worship. That is fear wearing the mask of godliness. Heathenism is, to a large extent, the offspring of fear. All thoughts of sacrifice as propitiating an offended God, and of giving "the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul;" penances and pilgrimages, the heathen idea of prayer, the heathen notion of worship, as if God needed anything and demanded it—they all come from that dark and coiling Fear which lurks in the heart.

And, my brethren, it affects so-called Christianity too. There are plenty of people amongst us who call themselves Christians, and fancy they are so, whose whole religion consists in deprecating the wrath of God whom they dimly think of as angry with them, and who, their consciences tell them, might well be so! Is that *your* Christianity?—fear which issues in slavish obedience to a hard law which you think of as standing over you with whip and lash, pointing to its tables of stone graven with a pen of iron, fit emblem of its rigorous behests, and sayings, "Do this, or thou shalt die;"—fear which

covers over the face of heaven and your own hearts with a dark veil, and arrays the Father of all goodness in the garb of a tyrant? It is all the Christianity which thousands in this land dream of.

Sometimes again this same fear takes the understanding into its pay, and appears as enlightened disbelief in God and immortality. It is not for me to judge individuals, or to say that in any given case intellectual scepticism is but the thin crust, the hardened surface-layer of the quaking bog of fear in the heart. I do not want to be uncharitable, but I believe that beneath the larger portion of the pronounced and formal intellectual unbelief of Christianity which afflicts the world there lie these two things—a sense of sin and a dread of God. The brain is often bribed by the conscience, and the wish becomes the father of the thought. The fool says in his heart first—No God!—an exclamation of desire, and then he is worse than foolish when he lets his wishes shape his creed, and drive him to utter next, as a full formed conclusion of his reason, "There is no God." And how often even that is not the whole process! The wish matured into a creed, the desire become a thought, and yet the haunting fear not laid, but rising often in the soul, "Perhaps after all—perhaps—there is a God, and if so, where do I stand?" That is fear in the mask of unbelief.

Sometimes it takes the shape of vehement efforts to get rid of unwelcome thought by fierce plunging into business, or into wild riot. How much of the restless energy in work, how much of the furious abandonment of vice, is nothing more than an attempt to drown the

still small voice, by the rushing noise of a turbid, foaming life! That is fear in the mask of mirth.

But whether it take the shape of fixed indifference or of wild dissipation, whether it be superciliously sceptical or punctiliously religious, whether it traffic with heaven and try to buy over God by penances and ceremonies, or seek to forget Him in merchandize and the whirl of business, fear which hath torment lies like a sleeping serpent in the hearts of all who think of God, and who cannot say, "We have known and believed the love which God hath to us."

Now, in the second place, we have to consider THE FEARLESSNESS OF LOVE—how "perfect love" casts out fear. Love is no weak thing, no mere sentiment. It does not ally itself most naturally with feeble natures, or with the feeble parts of a man's nature. It is the bravest of all human emotions. It makes heroes as its natural work. The "spirit of love" is always "the spirit of power," if it be the spirit, likewise, "of a sound mind." The manliness of Christian love, and the putting away from ourselves of all fear, because we are "perfected in love," is one of the highest lessons that the Gospel teaches us, and one of the greatest things which the Gospel gives us. The love of God is declared in this text to be the victorious antagonist of that fear of sin which has torment in it. In general we can see, I think, without difficulty, how the two, love and fear, do exclude one another. Fear is entirely based on a consideration of some possible personal evil consequence coming down upon me from that clear sky above me. Love is based upon the forgetfulness of self altogether. The very

essence of love is, that it looks away from itself, and to another. In the indulgence of the affection itself, whatever the object be, whether God or man, there is possessed, first of all, the joy of self-oblivion, and so of blessed freedom from that torturing and anxious thought, What will become of me? which makes the torment of Fear as the sister of Selfishness. It is because love is the going out of my heart, out of itself altogether, that it frees me at one sweep from all the torturing anxieties and trembling anticipations of personal consequences. Fill the heart with love, and there is an end to the dominion of fear!

But, more specifically, in accordance with the teaching of our text, the love of God entering into a man's heart, destroys all that fear of Him of which we have been speaking. All the attributes of God come to be on our side. He that loves has the whole Godhead for him. Conscience is calmed and quieted. There is no longer the sense of discord. God's love to us hath reconciled Him to us, and the implantation of love in our hearts towards Him hath reconciled us to Him. He hath put away from Himself the fierceness of His anger, and our belief of that is the putting away from us of the selfishness of our hatred.

"We love Him, because He first loved us." We are not speaking about a love towards God which is the man's work or in which he takes the initiative. There is no foundation for my love to God except only the old one, "God loves me." There is no proof that that foundation is laid except only the old one, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son,

that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." There is no way of building on that foundation except only the old one, We believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Saviour of the world! The love which casts out fear is not a vague emotion setting towards an unknown God; nor is it the result of a man's willing that he will put away from himself his hatred and his indifference, and will set himself in a new position towards God and His mercy: but it rises in the heart as a consequence of knowing and believing the love which God hath to us. Hence, again, it is the conqueror of fear. That flowed from conscience trembling before the half-seen face of the divine Judge. This comes when the eyes are opened to behold the full divine mercy in the face of Jesus Christ and there to see that God hath no anger, but is infinite LOVE. It is not by any power in our love to appease the stingings of sin, that we get rid of the fear. We lose it because our love comes from apprehending that great Gospel and blessed hope, that God's love is mine, mine in His Son, mine that my love may be perfectly fixed upon it, mine without disturbance from any of His awful attributes, mine without fear of loss or harm from *any* events. Believing this, the heart fills with a mighty tide of calm responding love which sweeps away on the crest of its rejoicing wave the vileness, the sorrows, the fears, which once littered and choked its channels. They are flooded out, and the heart is delivered. We stand peaceful, safe, blessed. Whatever betide, nothing can separate us from the love of God. We are bound to Him by that everlasting loving-kindness with which He has drawn us. There is

lifted off the heart the whole burden of "fearful looking-for of judgment," the whole burden arising from the dark thought, God is mighty, God *must be* righteous, God *may* strike!—because we know "He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Henceforth our thoughts of God are to be thoughts of perfect, absolute, everlasting Love, who is the foundation of our life, and the basis of all our hope and work. The love of God casts out the fear of God!

The love of God casts out *all other fear!* Every affection makes him who cherishes it, in some degree, braver, than he would have been without it. It is not degrading to this subject to remind you of what we see away far down in the scale of living beings. Look at that strange maternal instinct that in the lowest animals—out of weakness makes them strong, and causes them to forget all terror of the most terrible at the bidding of the mighty and conquering affection. Look at the same thing on the higher level of our own human life. It is not self-reliance that makes the hero. It is having the heart filled with passionate enthusiasm born of love for some person or for some thing. Love is gentle, but it is omnipotent, victor over all. It is the true hero, and martyr if need be, in the human heart! And when we rise to the highest form of it, namely, the love which is fixed upon God,—oh! how that should, and if it be right, will, strengthen and brace, and make every man, in whom it dwells, frank, fearless, careless of personal consequences.

My Christian friend, it becomes us to go about the world with uplifted heads and very calm hearts; setting forth the gentleness of Christ indeed, but setting forth

this too, the strength that flows from living love to our living Lord. The man that loves God, what has *he* to be afraid about? All events must be right for him. Every wind must be a south wind, blowing blessing and warmth. All men befriend and benefit him, whether they love him or hate him. Prosperity and adversity, the day and the night, the summer and the winter, joy and sorrow, are alike to him. "All things are yours," says the Apostle. All things serve the soul that loves Christ. The power of the love of God emancipates us from the possibility of harm, and therefore from the temptation to fear. Things present, and things to come, life, death, heights, depths, or any other creature, they are all His servants and our friends! Cowardice and anxiety, perplexity about life, trembling about the future, the bowed head and the burdened heart,—these are not the "fruits of the Spirit." "Perfect love casteth out fear," sets our faces as flints, if need be, before human opposition, lifts us up above being at the mercy of events and circumstances, rises coping with and mastering the fear of death, soars on lofty wing high above the darkness of the grave, and, as the Apostle in the context tells us, is made perfect herein, that we have the boldness in the day of judgment. Death, judgment; hell; men, devils; weaknesses within, foes without; poverty, distress, all the petty annoyances of life,—you can bruise them beneath your feet, Christian man, if only you are "out of weakness made strong," because your strength flows from Christ your life; and because "perfect LOVE casteth out fear," lifting the yoke of bondage from your neck, and casting out the gnawing torment from your hearts!

Let me remind you, before I pass on, how this love to God, which is built upon God's love to us, is, in contradistinction to that fear of which I have been speaking, the all-powerful motive for every good thing.

The only good that the existence of the passion of fear in a human spirit does, is to warn of danger and to prompt escape from calamity. It sometimes leads us to the place of safety, and then it vanishes and leaves us there to the guidance of a white-robed angel and a better friend. Fear and love rise up in antagonism to each other as motives in life, like those two mountains from which respectively the blessings and curses of the old law were pronounced—the Mount of Cursing, all barren, stony, without verdure and without water; the Mount of Blessing, green and bright with many a flower, and blessed with many a trickling rill. Fear is barren. Love is fruitful. The one is a slave, and its work is little worth. The other is free, and its deeds are great and precious. From the blasted summit of the mountain which gendereth to bondage may be heard the words of the law, but the power to keep all these laws must be sought on the sunny hill where liberty dwells in love and gives energy to obedience. Therefore, Christian man, if you would use in your own life the highest power that God has given us for our growth in grace, draw your arguments not from fear, but from love. And if you would win the world, melt it, do not hammer it. If you would grow in power, holiness, blessedness, remember this—"love is the fulfilling of the law." Perfect LOVE is perfect man!

Lastly, we must add by way of caution, and in order to avoid misconception that may arise from what I have

been saying—the thought that LOVE, which destroys fear, HEIGHTENS REVERENCE, AND DEEPENS SELF-DISTRUST. The Bible tells us—as, of course, we have heard over and over again—both that "perfect love casteth out fear," and that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," "Fear Him; yea, I say unto you, fear Him!" said Christ. It is not needful to dwell at any length upon the manifest distinction that lies between these two emotions, which are expressed by the same word. The fear which is cast out, though it goes by the same name, is in reality an altogether different thing from that which is enjoined as the foundation of all religion, and as being the abiding duty, and joy too, of Christian men. The one is simply the dread of personal consequences falling upon me. The other is that reverential and awe-stricken bowing down of myself before the face of the Infinite Majesty, which must ever be an element in the approach of created beings to Him. But it is worth noticing how love, which casts out dread, and makes us cease to be afraid of God, perfects reverence and makes us venerate with holy awe far deeper than ever subsisted by the side of terror, and yet makes us stand much nearer to God than when we were slaves, and crouched before the image of Him which conscience set up. A man who is trembling about personal consequences has no eye to appreciate the thing of which he is afraid. There is no reverence where there is desperate fear. He that is trembling lest the lightning should strike him, has no heart to feel the grandeur and to be moved by the solemn awfulness of the storm above his head. And a man to whom the whole thought, or the predominant thought, when God

rises before him, is, How awful will be the incidence of His perfections on my head! does not and durst not think about them, and reverence Him. Perfect love takes out of the heart all that bitter sense of possible evil coming on me and leaves me at liberty, with thankful, humble heart, and clear eye, to look into the centre of the brightness and see there the light of His infinite mercy. Love destroys fear, and perfects reverence.

Love destroys fear, and perfects self-distrust. "Work out your own salvation," is the Apostle's teaching, "with fear and trembling." If you call Him "Father" (the name that breathes from the loving heart), "pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." What sort of fear? The fear that is timid about self, because it is, and in order that it may be, confident of God; fear which means, I know I shall fall, unless Thou hold me up, and which then changes, by quick transition, into, I shall *not* fall, for the Lord is able to make me stand. Let that rule my heart. It blends in, most blessedly and perfectly, with perfect love to God; and there is no torment, but a solemn joy in the deep sense of mine own infirmity. "I will glory in infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

The whole, then, points to these two simple lessons, which we leave with you without expansion. *Those that love ought not to fear.* Christian people, you have nothing to do with terror. You are sinful, God is righteous. Your work is all imperfect, there is not a deed that is fit to stand in His presence. What then? Notwithstanding, you have not received the spirit of bondage, but you have "received the spirit of adoption whereby you cry,

Abba, Father!" Cry it more intensely in proportion as you know your sin, and never let the knowledge of your own sin tempt you to terror or despair, till you have no more a loving Father in heaven beseeching you to rest in His pardoning, sanctifying love. And then again: *They that fear ought to love.* Ay, friend, you *ought* to fear. It is a rational, sensible fear, justified by facts. It becomes you to be afraid; but then, are you going to stop there? Did you get that wholesome dread in order that it might weary you with its torment, and do nothing more? Did you get it in order that you might stifle it by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches? Did you get it in order that you might try to appease its ravenous maw, by flinging in whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices? What is it in your nature for, but for this—that, law-like, it should be "the schoolmaster to bring you to Christ"? Fear is the preface to love; and if it be in thy soul, my brother, let it lead thee to the place where there shall dawn upon thy heart that great and Divine vision of a face all full of mercy, of a heart all full of love, of a Christ that hath died for thee, of a Father that bends down to bless thee:—and then cast thyself down there and say, I trembled, because I hated. Thou hast loved me, and I am overcome. *I* love, and am glad. Father, Thy side is my home. Thou art the portion of my heart, and my joy for evermore!

WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

"WHAT God hath joined together, let not man put asunder!" Here are, joined together, in the compass of one practical exhortation, the truths which, put asunder, have been the war-cries and shibboleths of contending sects ever since. *Faith* in a finished salvation, and yet *work;* God working all *in* me, and yet I able and bound to work likewise; God upholding and sustaining His child to the very end, "perfecting that which concerns him," making his salvation certain and sure, and yet the Christian working "with fear and trembling," lest he should be a castaway, and come short of the grace of God;—who does not recognise in these phrases the mottoes that have been written on the opposing banners in many a fierce theological battle, waged with much harm to both sides, and ending in no clear victory to either? Yet here they are blended in the words of one who was no less profound a thinker

than any that have come after, and who had the gift of a Divine inspiration to boot.

Not less remarkable than the fusion here of apparent antagonisms, the harmonizing of apparent opposites, is the intensely practical character of the purpose for which they are adduced at all. Paul has no idea of giving his disciples a lesson in abstract theology, or laying for them a foundation of a philosophy of free will and Divine sovereignty; he is not merely communicating to these Philippians truths for their creed, but precepts for their deeds. The Bible knows nothing of an unpractical theology, but, on the other hand, the Bible knows still less of an untheological morality. It digs deep, bottoming the simplest right action upon right thinking, and going down to the mountain bases on which the very pillars of the universe rest, in order to lay there, firm and immoveable, the courses of the temple of a holy life. Just as little as Scripture gives countenance to the error that makes religion theology rather than life, just so little does it give countenance to the far more contemptible and shallower error common in our day, which *says*, Religion is not theology, but life; and *means*, "Therefore, it does not matter what theology you have, you can work a good life out with any creed!" The Bible never teaches unpractical speculations, and the Bible never gives precepts which do not rest on the profoundest truths. Would God, brethren, that we all had souls as wide as would take in the whole of the many-sided scriptural representation of the truths of the Gospel, and so avoid the narrowness of petty, partial views of God's infinite counsel; and that we had as close, direct, and as free

communication between head, and heart, and hand, as the Scripture has between precept and practice!

But in reference more especially to my text. Keeping in view these two points I have already suggested, namely, —that it is the reconciling of apparent opposites, and that it is intensely practical, I find in it these three thoughts; —First, a Christian has his whole salvation accomplished for him, and yet he is to work it out. Secondly, a Christian has everything done in him by God, and yet he is to work. Lastly, a Christian has his salvation certainly secured, and yet he is to fear and tremble.

In the first place, A CHRISTIAN MAN HAS HIS WHOLE SALVATION ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED FOR HIM IN CHRIST, AND YET HE IS TO WORK IT OUT. There are two points absolutely necessary to be kept in view in order to a right understanding of the words before us, for the want of noticing which it has become the occasion of terrible mistakes. These are—the persons to whom it is addressed, and the force of the scriptural expression "salvation." As to the first, this exhortation has been misapplied by being addressed to those who have no claim to be Christians, and by having such teaching deduced from it as, You do your part, and God will do His; You work, and God will certainly help you; You co-operate in the great work of your salvation, and you will get grace and pardon through Jesus Christ. Now let us remember the very simple thing, but very important to the right understanding of these words, that none but Christian people have anything to do with them. To all others, to all who are not already resting on the finished salvation of Jesus Christ, this injunction is utterly in-

applicable. It is addressed to the "beloved, who have always obeyed;" to the "saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi." The whole epistle is addressed, and this injunction with the rest, to Christian men. That is the first thing to be remembered. If there be any of you, who have thought that these words of Paul's to those who had believed on Christ contained a rule of action for you though you have not rested your souls on Him, and exhorted you to try to win salvation by your own doings, let me remind you of what Christ said when the Jews came to Him in a similar spirit, and asked Him, "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" His answer to them was, and His answer to you, my brother, is, "*This* is the work of God, that ye should *believe* in Him whom He hath sent." That is the first lesson: Not *work*, but *faith;* unless there be faith, no work. Unless you are a Christian, the passage has nothing to do with you.

But now, if this injunction be addressed to those who are looking for their salvation only to the perfect work of Christ, how can they be exhorted to work it out themselves? Is not the oft-recurring burden of Paul's teaching "not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but by His mercy He saved us"? How does this text harmonize with these constantly repeated assertions that Christ has done all for us, and that we have nothing to do, and can do nothing? To answer this question, we have to remember that that scriptural expression, "salvation," is used with considerable width and complexity of signification. It sometimes means the whole of the process, from the beginning to the end, by which we are

delivered from sin in all its aspects, and are set safe and stable at the right hand of God. It sometimes means one or other of three different parts of that process—either deliverance from the guilt, punishment, condemnation of sin; or secondly, the gradual process of deliverance from its power in our own hearts; or thirdly, the completion of that process by the final and perfect deliverance from sin and sorrow, from death and the body, from earth and all its weariness and troubles, which is achieved when we are landed on the other side of the river. Salvation, in one aspect, is a thing *past* to the Christian; in another, it is a thing *present;* in a third it is a thing *future.* But all these three are one; all are elements of the one deliverance—the one mighty and perfect act which includes them all.

These three all come equally from Christ himself. These three all depend equally on His work and His power. These three are all given to a Christian man in the first act of faith. But the attitude in which he stands in reference to that *accomplished* salvation which means deliverance from sin as a penalty and a curse, and that in which he stands to the continuing and progressive salvation which means deliverance from the power of evil in his own heart, are somewhat different. In regard to the one, he has only to take the finished blessing. He has to exercise faith and faith alone. He has nothing to do, nothing to add, in order to fit himself for it, but simply to receive the gift of God, and to believe "on Him whom He hath sent." But then, though that reception involves what shall come after it, and though every one who has and holds the first thing, the pardon

of his transgression, has and holds thereby and therein, his growing sanctifying, and his final glory, yet the salvation which means our being delivered from the evil that is in our hearts, and having our souls made like unto Christ, is one which—free gift though it be—is not ours on the sole condition of an initial act of faith, but is ours on the condition of continuous faithful reception and daily effort, not in our own strength, but in God's strength, to become like Him, and to make our own that which God has given us, and which Christ is continually bestowing upon us.

The two things, then, are not inconsistent—an accomplished salvation, a full, free, perfect redemption, with which a man has nothing to do at all, but to take it;—and, on the other hand, the injunction to them who have received this Divine gift. "Work out your own salvation." Work, as well as believe, and in the daily practice of faithful obedience, in the daily subjugation of your own spirits to His Divine power, in the daily crucifixion of your flesh with its affections and lusts, in the daily straining after loftier heights of godliness and purer atmospheres of devotion and love,—make more thoroughly your own that which you possess. Work into the substance of your souls that which you *have*. "Apprehend that for which you are apprehended of Christ." "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure;" and remember that not a past act of faith, but a present and continuous life of loving, faithful work in Christ, which is His and yet yours, is the "holding fast the beginning of your confidence firm unto the end."

In the second place, GOD WORKS ALL IN US, AND YET

WE HAVE TO WORK. There can be no mistake about the good faith and firm emphasis—as of a man that knows his own mind, and *knows* that his word is true—with which the Apostle holds up here the two sides of what I venture to call the one truth; "Work out your own salvation,—for God works in you." Command implies power. Command and power involve duty. The freedom of the Christian's action, the responsibility of the believer for his Christian growth in grace, the committal to the Christian man's own hands of the means of sanctifying, lie in that injunction, "Work out your own salvation." Is there any faltering, any paring down or cautious guarding of the words, in order that they may not seem to clash with the other side of the truth? No: Paul does not say, "Work it out; *yet* it is God that worketh in you;" not "Work it out *although* it is God that worketh in you;" not "Work it out, but then it must always be remembered and taken as a caution that it is God that worketh in you!" He blends the two things together in an altogether different connexion, and sees —strangely to some people, no contradiction, nor limitation, nor puzzle, but a ground of encouragement to cheerful obedience. Do you work, "*for* it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." And does the Apostle limit the Divine operation? Notice how his words seem picked out on purpose to express most emphatically its all-pervading energy. Look how his words seem picked out on purpose to express with the utmost possible emphasis that all which a good man is and does, is its fruit. It is God that *worketh in* you. That expresses more than bringing

outward means to bear upon heart and will. It speaks of an inward, real, and efficacious operation of the Indwelling Spirit of all energy on the spirit in which He dwells. "Worketh in you *to will*." This expresses more than the presentation of motives from without, it points to a direct action on the will, by which impulses are originated within. God puts in you the first faint motions of a better will. "Worketh in you, doing as well as willing." This points to all practical obedience, to all external acts as flowing from His grace in us, no less than all inward good thoughts and holy desires.

It is not that God gives men the power, and then leaves them to make the use of it. It is not that the desire and purpose come forth from Him, and that then we are left to ourselves to be faithful or unfaithful stewards in carrying it out. The whole process, from the first sowing of the seed until its last blossoming and fruiting, in the shape of an accomplished act, of which God shall bless the springing—it is all God's together! A thorough-going, absolute attribution of every power, every action, all the thoughts, words, and deeds of a Christian soul, to God. No words could be selected which would more thoroughly cut away the ground from every half-and-half system which attempts to deal them out in two portions, part God's and part mine. With all emphasis Paul attributes all to God.

And none the less strongly does he teach, by the implication contained in his earnest injunction, that human responsibility, that human control over the human will, and that reality of human agency which are often thought

to be annihilated by these broad views of God as originating all good in the soul and life. The Apostle thought this doctrine did not absorb all our individuality in one great Divine Cause which made men mere tools and puppets. He did not believe that the inference from it was, "Therefore do you sit still, and feel yourselves the cyphers that you are. His practical conclusion is the very opposite. It is—God does all, therefore do you work. His belief in the power of God's grace was the foundation of the most intense conviction of the reality and indispensableness of his own power, and was the motive which stimulated him to vigorous action. Work, for God works in you.

Each of these truths rests firmly on its own appropriate evidence. My own consciousness tells me that I am free, that I have power, that I am therefore responsible and exposed to punishment for neglect of duty. I know what I mean when I speak of the will of God, because I myself am conscious of a will. The power of God is an object of intelligent thought to me, because I myself am conscious of power. And on the other hand, that belief in a God which is one of the deep and universal beliefs of men contains in it, when it comes to be thought about, the belief in Him as the source of all power, as the great cause of all. If I believe in a God at all, I must believe that He whom I so call, worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. These two convictions are both given to us in the primitive beliefs which belong to us all. The one rests on consciousness, and underlies all our moral judgments. The other rests on an original belief, which belongs to man as such.

These two mighty pillars on which all morality and all religion repose have their foundations down deep in our nature, and tower up beyond our sight. They seem to stand opposite to each other, but it is only as the strong piers of some tall arch are opposed. Beneath they repose on one foundation, above they spring together in the completing keystone and bear the whole steady structure.

Wise and good men have toiled to harmonize them, in vain. The task transcends the limits of human faculties, as exercised here, at all events. Perhaps the time may come when we shall be lifted high enough to see the binding arch, but here on earth we can only behold the shafts on either side. The history of controversy on the matter surely proves abundantly what a hopeless task they undertake who attempt to reconcile these truths. The attempt has usually consisted in speaking the one loudly and the other in a whisper, and then the opposite side has thundered what had been whispered, and has whispered very softly what had been shouted very loudly. One party lays hold of the one pole of the ark, and the other lays hold of that on the other side. The fancied reconciliation consists in paring down one-half of the full-orbed truth to nothing, or in admitting it in words while every principle of the reconciler's system demands its denial. Each antagonist is strong in his assertions, and weak in his denials, victorious when he establishes his half of the whole, easily defeated when he tries to overthrow his opponent's.

This apparent incompatibility is no reason for rejecting

truths each commended to our acceptance on their own proper grounds. It may be a reason for not attempting to dogmatize about them. It may be a warning to us that we are on ground where our limited understandings have no firm footing, but it is no ground for suspecting the evidence which certifies the truths. The Bible admits and enforces them both. It never tones down the emphasis of its statement of the one for fear of clashing against the other, but points to us the true path for thought in the firm grasp of both, in the abandonment of all attempts to reconcile them, and for practical conduct in the peaceful trust in God who hath wrought all our works in us, and in strenuous working out of our own salvation. Let us, as we look back on that battlefield where much wiser men than we have fought in vain, doing little but raising up "a little dust that is lightly laid again," and building trophies that are soon struck down, learn the lesson it teaches, and be contented to say, The short cord of my plummet does not quite go down to the bottom of the bottomless, and I do not profess either to understand God or to understand man, both of which I should want to do before I understood the mystery of their conjoint action. Enough for me to believe that,

> "If any force we have, it is to ill,
> And all the power is God's to do and eke to will."

Enough for me to know that I have solemn duties laid upon me, a life's task to be done, my deliverance from mine own evil to work out, and that I shall only accomplish that work when I can say with the Apostle, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

God is all, but *thou* canst work! My brother, take this belief, that God worketh all in you, for the ground of your confidence, and feel that unless He do all, you can do nothing. Take this conviction, that thou canst work, for the spur and stimulus of thy life, and think, These desires in my soul come from a far deeper source than the little cistern of my own individual life. They are God's gift. Let me cherish them with the awful carefulness which their origin requires, lest I should seem to have received the grace of God in vain. These two streams of truth are like the rain-shower that falls upon the water-shed of a country. The one half flows down the one side of the everlasting hills, and the other down the other. Falling into rivers that water different continents, they at length find the sea, separated by the distance of half the globe. But the sea into which they fall is one, in every creek and channel. And so, the truth into which these two apparent opposites converge, is "the depth of the wisdom and the knowledge of God," whose ways are past finding out—the Author of all goodness, who, if we have any holy thought, has given it us; if we have any true desire, has implanted it; has given us the strength to do the right and to live in His fear; and who yet, doing all the willing and the doing, says to us, "Because I do everything, therefore let not *thy* will be paralysed, or *thy* hand palsied; but because I do everything, therefore will *thou* according to My will, and do *thou* according to My commandments!"

Lastly: THE CHRISTIAN HAS HIS SALVATION SECURED, AND YET HE IS TO FEAR AND TREMBLE. "Fear and trembling." "But," you may say, "perfect love casts

out fear." So it does. The fear which has torment it casts out. But there is another fear in which there is no torment, brethren; a fear and trembling which is but another shape of confidence and calm hope! Scripture does tell us that the believing man's salvation is certain. Scripture tells us it is certain since he believes. And your faith can be worth nothing unless it have, bedded deep in it, that trembling distrust of your own power which is the pre-requisite and the companion of all thankful and faithful reception of God's infinite mercy. Your horizon ought to be full of fear, if your gaze be limited to yourself; but oh! above our earthly horizon with its fogs God's infinite blue stretches, untroubled by the mist and cloud which are earth-born. I, as working, have need to tremble and to fear, but I, as wrought upon, have a right to confidence and hope, a hope that is full of immortality, and an assurance which is the pledge of its own fulfilment. The worker is nothing, the Worker in him is all. Fear and trembling, when the thoughts turn to mine own sins and weaknesses, hope and confidence when they turn to the happier vision of God! "Not I"—there is the tremulous self-distrust; "the grace of God in me"—there is the calm assurance of victory. Forasmuch, then, as God worketh all things, be *you* diligent, faithful, prayerful, confident. Forasmuch as Christ has perfected the work for you, do *you* "go on unto perfection." Let all fear and trembling be yours, as a man; let all confidence and calm trust be yours as a child of God. Turn your confidence and your fears alike into prayer. "Perfect, O Lord, that which concerneth me; forsake not the work of Thine own

hands!"—and the prayer will evoke a merciful answer, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. God is faithful, who hath called you unto the Gospel of His Son; and *will* keep you unto His everlasting kingdom of glory."

AHAB AND ELIJAH.

1 KINGS xxi. 20.

And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?

THE key-note of Elijah's character is *force*—the force of righteousness. The New Testament, you remember, talks about the "power of Elias." The outward appearance of the man corresponds to his function and his character. Gaunt and sinewy, dwelling in the desert, feeding on locusts and wild honey, with a girdle of camel's skin about his loins, he bursts into the history, amongst all that corrupt state of society, with the force of a hammer that God's hand wields. The whole of his career is marked by this one thing,—the strength of a righteous man. And then, on the other hand, this Ahab;—the key-note of *his* character is the weakness of wickedness, and the wickedness of weakness. Think of him. Weakly longing—as idle and weak minds in lofty places always do—after something that belongs to somebody else; with all his gardens, coveting the one little herb-plot of the poor Naboth; weak and worse than womanly, turning his face to the wall and weeping when he cannot get it; weakly desiring to have it, and yet not knowing how to set about accomplishing his

wish; and then—as is always the case, for there are always tempters everywhere for weak people — that beautiful fiend by his side, like the other queen in our great drama, ready to screw the feeble man that she is wedded to, to the sticking place, and to dare anything, to grasp that on which the heart was set. And so the deed is done: Naboth safe stoned out of the way; and Ahab goes down to take possession! The lesson of that is, my friend,—Weak dallying with forbidden desires is sure to end in wicked clutching at them. Young men, take care! You stand upon the beetling edge of a great precipice, when you look over, from your fancied security, at a wrong thing; and to strain too far, and to look too fixedly, leads to a perilous danger of toppling over and being lost! If you know that a thing cannot be won without transgression, do not tamper with hankerings for it. Keep away from the edge, and "*shut* your eyes from beholding vanity."

But my business now is rather with the consequences of this apparently successful sin, than with what went before it. The king gets the crime done, shuffles it off himself on to the shoulders of his ready tools in the little village, goes down to get his toy, and gets it—but he gets Elijah along with it, which was more than he reckoned on. When, all full of impatience and hot haste to solace himself with his new possession, he rushes down to seize the vineyard, he finds there, standing at the gate, waiting for him—black-browed, motionless, grim, an incarnate conscience—the prophet he had not seen for years, the prophet that he had last seen on Carmel, bearding alone the servants of Baal, and executing on them the solemn

judgment of death; and there leaps at once to his lip, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"

I find here, in the first place, this broad principle: PLEASURE WON BY SIN IS PEACE LOST. That is my first thought. Ah, my brother, it does not need that there should be a rebuking prophet standing by to work out that law. God commits the execution of it to the natural operations of our own consciences and our own spirits. Here is the fact in men's natures on which it partly depends: when sin is yet tempting us, it is loved; when sin is done, it is loathed. Action and reaction, as the mechanicians tell us, are equal and contrary. The more violent the blow with which we strike upon the forbidden pleasure, the further back the rebound after the stroke. When sin tempts—when there hangs glittering before a man the golden fruit that he knows he ought not to touch—then, amidst the noise of passion or the sophistry of desire, conscience is silenced for a little while. No man sins without knowing it is wrong, without knowing that in the long run it is a mistake; but at the instant, in the delirium of yielding, as in moments of high physical excitement, he is blind and deaf, deaf to the voice of reason, blind to the sight of consequences. Conscience and consequence are alike lost sight of. Like a mad bull, the man that is tempted lowers his head and shuts his eyes, and rushes right on. The moment that the sin is done, that moment the passion or desire which tempted to it is satiated, and ceases to exist for the time. It is gone as a motive. Like some savage beast, being fed full, it lies down to sleep. There is a vacuum left in the heart, the noise is stilled, and then

—and then—conscience begins to speak. Or, to take another image, the passion, the desires, the impulses that lead us to do wrong things—they are like a crew that mutiny, and take for a moment the wheel from the steersman and the command from the captain, but then, having driven the ship on the rocks, the mutineers get intoxicated, and lie down and sleep. Passion fulfils itself, and expires. The desire is satisfied, and it turns into a loathing. The tempter draws us to him, and then unveils the horrid face that lies beneath the mask. When the deed is done and cannot be undone, then comes satiety; then comes the reaction of the fierce excitement, the hot blood begins to flow more slowly; then rises up in the heart conscience; then rises up in majesty in the soul reason; then flashes and flares before the eye the vivid picture of the consequences. His enemy has found the sinner. He has got the vineyard—ay, but Elijah is there, and his dark and stern presence sucks all the brightness and the sunniness out of the landscape; and Naboth's blood stains the leaves of Naboth's garden! There is no sin which is not the purchase of pleasure at the price of peace.

Now, you will say that all that is true in regard to the grosser forms of transgression, but that it is not true in regard to the less vulgar and sensual kinds of crime. Of course it is most markedly observable with regard to the coarsest kind of sins; but it is as true, though perhaps not in the same degree—not in the same prominent, manifest way at any rate—in regard to every sin that a man does. There is never an evil thing which—knowing it to be evil—we commit, which does not rise up

to testify against us. As surely as (in the words of our great philosopher poet) "lust dwells hard by hate;" and as surely as to-night's debauch is followed by to-morrow's headache; so surely—each after its kind, and each in its own region—every sin lodges in the human heart the seed of a quick-springing punishment, yea, is its own punishment. When we come to grasp the sweet thing that we have been tempted to seize, there is a serpent that starts up amongst all the flowers. When the evil act is done—opposite of the prophet's roll—it is sweet in the lips, but oh! it is bitter afterwards. "At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder!"

Then, you may say again, All that is very much exaggerated. That is not the sort of feeling which men that go on persistently doing wrong things, cherish. They live quietly and contentedly enough. "There are no bands in their death, and their strength is firm." All that would be true if men's consciences kept sensitive in the midst of men's sins, but they do not; and so it cannot be that every transgression has thus its quick result in loss of peace!—I grant you at once that it is quite possible for men to sin away the delicacy and susceptibility of their consciences. I daresay there are people here now who, according to the other saying of the Book, after they have done a wrong thing, "wipe their mouth, and say, I have done no harm," and go on very quietly, with no knowledge of those agonies that I have been speaking about, with scarcely ever a prick of conscience for their sin. But what then? I did not say that all sin purchased pleasure by inflictions of agony; but I say, that all sin purchases pleasure by loss of peace.

The silence of a seared conscience is not peace. For peace you want something more than that a conscience shall be dumb, my brother. For peace you want something more than that you shall be able to live without the daily sense and sting of sin. You want not only the negative absence of pain, but the positive presence of a tranquillizing guest in your heart—that conscience of yours testifying with you, blessing you in its witness, and shedding abroad rest and comfort. It is easy to kill a conscience, after a fashion at least. It is easy to stifle it. It is easy to come to that depth of wrong-doing that one gets used to it, and does it without caring. But oh! that cold vacuum, that dead absence in such a spirit of all healthy self-communing, that painful suspicion, "If I look into myself, and be quiet for a little while, and take stock of my own character, and see what I am, the balance will be on the wrong side," that is *not* peace. As the old historian says about the Roman armies that marched through a country, burning and destroying every living thing, "They make a solitude, and they call it peace." And so men do with their consciences. They stifle them, sear them, forcibly silence them, somehow or other; and then, when there is a dead stillness in the heart, broken by no voice of either approbation or blame, but doleful like the unnatural quiet of a deserted city, then they say it is peace, and the man's uncontrolled passions and unbridled desires dwell solitary in the fortress of his own spirit! You *may* almost attain to that. Do you think it is a goal to be set before you as an ideal of human nature? The loss of peace is certain—the presence of agony is most likely—from every act of sin.

And so, it is not only a *crime* that men commit when they do wrong, but it is a *blunder*. Sin is not only guilt, but it is a mistake. "The game is not worth the candle," according to the French proverb. The thing that you buy is not worth the price you pay for it. Sin is like a great forest-tree that we may sometimes see standing up green in its leafy beauty, and spreading a broad shadow over half a field; but when we get round on the other side, there is a great dark hollow in the very heart of it, and corruption is at work there. It is like the poison-tree in travellers' stories, tempting weary men to rest beneath its thick foliage, and insinuating death into the limbs that relax in the fatal coolness of its shade. It is like the apples of Sodom, fair to look upon, but turning to acrid ashes on the unwary lips. It is like the magician's rod that we read about in old books. There it lies; and if tempted by its glitter, or fascinated by the power that it proffers you, you take it in your hand, the thing starts into a serpent with erected crest and sparkling eye, and plunges its quick barb into the hand that holds it, and sends poison through all the veins. Do not touch it, my brother! Every sin buys pleasure at the price of peace. Elijah is always waiting at the gate of the ill-gotten possession.

In the second place, SIN IS BLIND TO ITS TRUE FRIENDS AND ITS REAL FOES. "Hast thou found me, *O mine enemy?*" Elijah was the best friend he had in his kingdom. And that Jezebel there, the wife of his bosom, whom he loved and thanked for this thing, she was the worst foe that hell could have sent him. Ay, and so it is always. The faithful rebuker, the merciful inflictor of

pain, is the truest friend of the wrong-doer. The worst enemy of the sinful heart is the voice that either tempts it into sin, or lulls it into self-complacency. And this is one of the certainest workings of evil desires in our spirits, that they pervert for us all the relations of things, that they make us blind to all the moral truths of God's universe. Sin is blind as to itself, blind as to its own consequences, blind as to who are its friends and who are its foes, blind as to earth, blind as to another world, blind as to God. The man that walks in the "vain show" of transgression, whose heart is set upon evil,—he fancies that ashes are bread, and stones gold (as in the old fairy story); and, on the other hand, he thinks that the true sweet is the bitter, and turns away from God's angels and God's prophets, with "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" That is the reason, my friend, of not a little of the infidelity that haunts this world—that sin, perverted and blinded, stumbles about in its darkness, and mistakes the face of the friend for the face of the foe. God sends you in mercy a conscience to prick and sting you that you may be kept right; and you think that *it* is your enemy. God sends in His mercy the discipline of life, pains and sorrows, to draw us away from the wrong, to make us believe that the right in this world and the next is life, and that holiness is happiness for evermore. And then, when, having done wrong, God's merciful messenger of a sharp sorrow finds us out, we say, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" and begin to wonder about the mysteries of Providence, and how it comes that there is evil in the creation of a good God. Why, physical evil is the best friend of the man that is subject

to moral evil. Sorrow is the truest blessing to a sinner. The best thing that can befal any of us is that God shall not let us alone in any wrong course, without making us feel His rod, without hedging up our way with thorns, and sending us by His grace into a better one. There is no mystery in sorrow. There is a mystery in sin; but, sorrow following on the back of sin, is the true friend, and not the enemy of the wrong-doing spirit.

And then, again, God sends us a Gospel full of dark words about evil. It deals with that fact of sin, as no other system ever did. There is no book like the Bible for these two things,—for the lofty notion that it has about what man may be and ought to be; and for the notion that it has of what man is. It does not degrade human nature, because it tells us the truth about human nature as it is. Its darkest and bitterest sayings about transgression, they are veiled promises, my brother. It does not *make* the consequences of sin which it writes down. You and I make them for ourselves, and it tells us of them. Did the lighthouse make the rock that it stands on? Is it to be blamed for the shipwreck? If a man *will* go full tilt against the thing that he knows will ruin him, what is the right name for Him that hedges it up with a prickly fence of thorns, and puts a great light above it, and writes below, "If thou comest here thou diest"? Is that the work of an enemy? And yet that is why people talk about the gloomy views of the Gospel, about the narrow spirit of Christianity, about the harsh things that are here! The Bible did not make hell. The Bible did not make sin the parent of sorrow. The Bible did not make it certain that "every transgression and

disobedience should reap its just recompense of reward." We are the causes of their coming upon ourselves; and the Bible but proclaims the end to which the paths of sin must lead, and beseechingly calls to us all, "Turn ye, turn ye! why will ye die?" And yet when it comes to you, how many of you turn away from it, and say, "It is mine enemy"! How many shrink from its merciful knife, that cuts into all the wounds of the festering spirit! How many of you feel as if "the truth that is in Jesus" was a hard and bitter truth; when all the while its very heart's blood is love, and the very secret of its message is the tenderest compassion, the most yearning sympathy, for every soul amongst us!

Ay, and more than that:—sin makes us fancy that God himself is our enemy; and sin makes that thought of God that ought to be most blessed and most sweet to us, the terror of our souls. You have the power, my friend, by your own wrong-doing, of perverting the whole universe, and, worst of all, of distorting the image of the merciful Father, of the loving God. God loves. God is the Father. God watches over us. God will not let us alone when we transgress. God in His love has appointed that sin shall breed sorrow. But *we*—we do wrong; and then, for God's Providence, and God's Gospel, and God's Son, and God himself, there rises up in our hearts the hostile feeling, and we think that He is turned to be our enemy, and fights against us! But oh! He only fights against us that we may submit, and love Him. Will you, then, have it that God's highest mercy should be your greatest sorrow, that your truest friend should be your worst foe? You can make the choice.

To you God and His truth are like that ark of His covenant which to Dagon and the Philistines was a curse, but to the house of Obededom was a blessing. He and His Gospel are to you like that pillar that was darkness and trouble to the hosts of the Egyptians, but light by night to His children. To you, my brother, the Gospel may be either "the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death!" If He comes to you with rebuke, and meets you when you are at the very door of your sin, and busy with your transgression,—usher Him in, and thank Him, and bless Him for words of threatening, for merciful severity, for conviction of sin;—because conviction of sin is the work of the Comforter; and all the threatenings and all the pains that follow and track, like swift hounds, the committer of evil, are sent by Him who loves too wisely not to punish transgression, and loves too well to punish without warning, and desires only when He punishes that we should turn from our evil way, and escape the condemnation. An enemy, or a friend,—*which* is God in His truth to you?

Lastly, THE SIN WHICH MISTAKES THE FRIENDLY APPEAL FOR AN ENEMY, LAYS UP FOR ITSELF A TERRIBLE RETRIBUTION. Elijah comes here and prophesies the fall of Ahab. The next peal, the next flash, fulfil the prediction. There, where he did the wrong, he died. In Jezreel, Ahab died. In Jezreel, Jezebel died. That plain was the battle-field for the subsequent discomfiture of Israel. Over and over again there encamped upon it the hosts of the spoilers. Over and over again its soil ran red with the blood of the children of Israel; and at last, in the destruction of the kingdom, Naboth was

avenged and God's word fulfilled. The threatened evil was foretold that it might lead the king to repentance, and that thus it might never need to be more than a threat. But, though Ahab was partially penitent, and partially listened to the prophet's voice; yet for all that, he went on in his evil way. Therefore the merciful threatening becomes a stern prophecy, and is fulfilled to the very letter. And so, when God's message comes to us, friends, if we listen not to it, and turn not to its gentle rebuke, oh, then we gather up for ourselves an awful futurity of judgment, when threatening darkens into punishment, and the voice that rebuked swells into the voice of final condemnation. When a man fancies that God's prophet is his enemy, and dreams that his finding him out is a calamity and a loss, that man may be certain that something worse will find him out some day. His sins will find him out, and that is worse than the prophet's coming! My friend! picture to yourself this—a human spirit shut up, with the companionship of its forgotten and dead transgressions! There is a resurrection of acts as well as of bodies. Think what it will be for a man to sit surrounded by that ghastly company, the ghosts of his own sins!—and as each forgotten fault and buried badness comes, silent and sheeted, into that awful society, and sits itself down there, think of him greeting each with the question, "Thou too? What! are ye all here? Hast *thou* found me, O mine enemy?" and from each bloodless spectral lip there tolls out the answer, the knell of his life, "I *have* found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord." Ah, my friend! if that were all we had to say, it might

well stiffen us into stony despair. Thank God—thank God! such an issue is not inevitable. Christ speaks to you. Christ is your *friend*. He loves you, and He speaks to you now—speaks to you of your danger, but in order that you may never rush into it and be engulfed by it; speaks to you of your sin, but in order that you may say to Him, "Take Thou it away, O merciful Lord;" speaks to you of justice, but in order that you may never sink beneath the weight of His stroke; speaks to you of love, in order that you may know, and fully know, the depth of His graciousness. When He says to you, "I love thee; love thou Me: I have died for thee; trust Me, live *by* Me, and live *for* Me," will you not say to Him, "My Friend, my Brother, my Lord, and my God"?

ANXIOUS CARE.

ST. MATTHEW vi. 24, 25.

Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life.

FORESIGHT and foreboding are two very different things. It is not that the one is the exaggeration of the other, but the one is opposed to the other. The more a man looks forward, in the exercise of foresight, the less he does so in the exercise of foreboding. And the more he is tortured by anxious thoughts about a *possible* future, the less clear vision has he of a *likely* future, and the less power to influence it. When Christ here, therefore, enjoins the abstinence from thought for our life and for the future, it is not for the sake of getting away from the pressure of a very unpleasant command that we say, He does not mean to prevent the exercise of wise and provident foresight and preparation for what is to come. When this English version of ours was made, the phrase "taking thought" meant solicitous anxiety, and that is the true rendering and proper meaning of the original. The idea is, therefore, that here there is forbidden for a Christian, not the careful preparation for

what is likely to come, not the foresight of the storm, and taking in sail while yet there is time, but the constant occupation and distraction of the heart with gazing forward, and fearing, and being weakened thereby; or, to come back to words already used, foresight is commanded, and, *therefore*, foreboding is forbidden. My only object now, is to endeavour to gather together by their link of connexion, the whole of those precepts which follow my text to the close of the chapter; and to try to set before you, in the order in which they stand, and in their organic connexion with each other, the reasons which Christ gives for the absence of anxious care from our minds.

I mass them all into three. If you notice, the whole section, to the end of the chapter, is divided into three parts, by the threefold repetition of the injunction, "Take no thought." "*Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.*" The reason for the command as given in this first section follows:—*Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?* The expansion of that runs on to the close of the thirtieth verse.

Then there follows another division or section of the whole, marked by the repetition of the command, "*Take no thought,*"—*saying,* "*What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*" The reason given for the command in this second section is—"(*for after all these things do the Gentiles seek:*) *for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God.*"

And then follows a third section marked by the third

repetition of the command, "*Take no thought for the morrow.*" The reason given for the command in this third section is—"*for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.*"

Now if we try to generalize the lessons that lie in these three great divisions of the Sermon on the Mount, we get, I think, these,—anxious thought is contrary to all the lessons of nature; which show it to be unnecessary. That is the first, the longest section. Then, secondly, anxious thought is contrary to all the lessons of revelation or religion; which show it to be heathenish. And lastly, anxious thought is contrary to the whole scheme of Providence; which shows it to be futile. You do not *need* to be anxious. It is *wicked* to be anxious. It is *of no use* to be anxious. These are the three things,—contrary to the lessons of Nature; contrary to the great principles of the Gospel; and contrary to the scheme of Providence. Let us try now simply to follow the course of thought in our Lord's illustration of these three principles.

The first is the consideration of THE TEACHING OF NATURE. "*Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*" And then comes the illustration of the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field.

The whole of these four or five verses fall into these general thoughts: You are obliged to trust God for your body, for its structure, for its form, for its habitudes, and for the length of your being; you are obliged to trust Him for the foundation—trust Him for the superstructure. You are obliged to trust Him, whether you will

or not, for the greater—trust Him gladly for the less. You cannot help being dependent. After all your anxiety, it is only directed to the providing of the things that are needful for the life; the life itself, though it be a natural thing, comes direct from God's hand; and all that you can do, with all your carking cares, and laborious days, and sleepless nights, is but to adorn a little more beautifully or a little less beautifully, the allotted span—but to feed a little more delicately or a little less delicately, the body which God has given you! What is the use of being careful for food and raiment, when down below these necessities there lies the awful question,—for the answer to which you have to hang helpless, in implicit, powerless dependence upon God,—Shall I live, or shall I die? shall I have a body instinct with vitality, or a body crumbling amidst the clods of the valley? After all your work, your anxiety gets but such a little way down; like some passing shower of rain, that only softens an inch of the hard-baked surface of the soil, and has nothing to do with fructifying the seed that lies feet below the reach of its useless moisture. Anxious care is foolish; for far beyond the region within which your anxieties move, there is the greater region in which there must be entire dependence upon God. "Is not the life more than meat? Is not the body more than raiment?" You *must* trust Him for that; you may as well trust Him for all the rest.

Then, again, there comes up this other thought: Not only are you compelled to exercise un-anxious dependence in regard to a matter which you cannot influence—the life of the body—and that is the greater: but, still fur-

ther, *God gives you that.* Very well: God gives you the greater; and God's great gifts are always inclusive of God's little gifts. When He bestows the thing, He bestows all the consequences of the thing as well. When He gives a life, He swears by the gift that He will give what is needful to sustain it. God does not stop half way in any of His bestowments. He gives royally and liberally, honestly and sincerely, logically and completely. When He bestows a life, therefore, you may be quite sure that He is not going to stultify His own gift by retaining unbestowed anything that is wanted for its blessing and its power. You have had to trust Him for the greater; trust Him for the less. He has given you the greater; no doubt He will give you the less. "*The life is more than meat, and the body than raiment.*" "*Which of you, by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment?*"

Then there is another thought. Look at God's ways of doing with all His creatures. The animate and the inanimate creation are appealed to, the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, the one in reference to food and the other in reference to clothing, which are the two great wants already spoken of by Christ in the previous verses. I am not going to linger at all on the exquisite beauty of these illustrations. Every sensitive heart and pure eye dwells upon them with delight. The "fowls of the air," "the lilies of the field," "they toil not, neither do they spin;" and then, with what an eye for the beauty of God's universe,—"Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these!" Now, what is the force of this consideration? It is this—**There is a**

specimen, in an inferior creation, of the same principles which *you* can trust, you men who are "better than they." And not only that:—There is an instance, not only of God's giving things that are necessary, but of God's giving more, lavishing *beauty* upon the flowers of the field. I do not think that we sufficiently dwell upon the moral and spiritual uses of beauty in God's universe. That everywhere His loving, wooing hand should touch the flower into grace, and deck all barren places with glory and with fairness — what does *that* reveal to us about Him? It says to us, He does not give scantily: it is not the mere measure of what is wanted, absolutely needed, to support a bare existence, that God bestows. He taketh pleasure in the prosperity of His servants. Joy, and love, and beauty, belong to Him; and the smile upon His face that comes from the contemplation of His own fairness flung out into His glorious creation, is a prophecy of the gladness that comes into His heart from His own holiness and more ethereal beauty adorning the spiritual creatures whom He has made to flash back His likeness. The flowers of the field are so clothed that we may learn the lesson that it is a fair Spirit, and a loving Spirit, and a bountiful Spirit, and a royal heart, that presides over the bestowments of creation, and allots gifts to men.

But notice further, how much of the force of what Christ says here, depends on the consideration of *the inferiority of these creatures who are thus blessed;* and also notice what are the particulars of that inferiority. We read that verse, "*They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns,*" as if it marked out a particular in

which their free and untoilsome lives were superior to ours. It is the very opposite. It is part of the thing that marks them as lower than we, that they have not to work for the future. They reap not, they sow not, they gather not;—are ye not much better than they? Better in this, amongst other things, that God has given us the privilege of influencing the future by our faithful toil, by the sweat of our brow and the labour of our hands. These creatures labour not, and yet they are fed. And the lesson for us is, Much more may we, whom God has blessed with the power of work, and gifted with force to mould the future, be sure that He will bless the exercise of the prerogative by which He exalts us above inferior creatures, and makes us capable of toil. *You* can influence to-morrow. What you can influence by work, fret not about, for you *can* work. What you cannot influence by work, fret not about, for it is vain. "They toil not, neither do they spin;" You are lifted above them because God has given you hands, that can grasp the tool or the pen. Man's crown of glory, as well as man's curse and punishment, is, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread." So learn what you have to do with that great power of anticipation. It is meant to be the *guide of wise work.* It is meant to be the support for far-reaching, strenuous action. It is meant to elevate us above mere living from hand to mouth; to ennoble the whole being by leading to and directing toil that is blessed because there is no anxiety in it, labour that will be successful since it is according to the will of that God who has endowed us with the power of putting it forth.

Then there comes another inferiority. "*Your heavenly Father* feedeth them." They cannot say "*Father!*" and yet they are fed. You are above them by the prerogative of toil. You are above them by the nearer relation which you sustain to your Father in heaven. He is their Maker, and lavishes His goodness upon them: He is your Father, and He will not forget His child. *They* cannot trust: *you* can. *They* might be anxious, if they could look forward, for they know not the hand that feeds them: but *you* can turn round, and recognise the source of all blessings. So doubly ought you to be guarded from care by the lesson of that free joyful Nature that lies round about you, and say, No fear of famine, nor of poverty, nor of want; for He feedeth the ravens when they cry. No reason for distrust! Shame on me if I am anxious! for every lily of the field blows its beauty, and every bird of the air carols its song without sorrowful foreboding, and yet there is no *Father* in the heaven to them!

And the last inferiority is this: "*To-day it is, and to-morrow it is cast into the oven.*" Their little life is thus blessed and brightened. Oh, how much greater will be the mercies that belong to them who have a longer life upon earth, and who never die! The lesson is not —These are the plebeians in God's universe, and you are the aristocracy, and you may trust Him; but it is,— They, by their inferior place, have lesser and lower wants, wants but for a bounded being, wants that stretch not beyond earthly existence, and that for a brief span. They are blessed in the present, for the oven to-morrow saddens not the blossoming to-day. You have nobler

necessities and higher longings, wants that belong to a soul that never dies, to a nature which may glow with the consciousness that God is your Father, wants which "look before and after," therefore, you are "better than they;" and "shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

And now, in the second place, there is here another general line of considerations tending to dispel all anxious care—the thought that IT IS CONTRARY TO ALL THE LESSONS OF RELIGION, OR REVELATION, WHICH SHOW IT TO BE HEATHENISH. There are three clauses devoted to the illustration of this thought: "*After all these things do the Gentiles seek;*"—"*your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things;*"—"*seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*"

The first contains the principle, that solicitude for the future is at bottom heathen worldly-mindedness. The heathen tendency in us all leads to an over-estimate of material good, and it is a question of circumstances whether that shall show itself in heaping up earthly treasures, or in anxious care. They are the same plant, only the one is growing in the tropics of sunny prosperity, and the other in the arctic zone of chill penury. The one is the sin of the worldly-minded rich man, the other is the sin of the worldly-minded poor man. The character is the same turned inside out! And therefore, the words "ye cannot serve God and Mammon," stand in this chapter in the centre between our Lord's warning against laying up treasures on earth, and His warnings against being full of cares for earth. He would show us

thereby that these two apparently opposite states of mind in reality spring from that one root, and are equally, though differently, "serving Mammon." We do not sufficiently reflect upon that. We say, perhaps, this intense solicitude of ours is a matter of temperament, or of circumstances. So it may be: but the Gospel was sent to help us to cure worldly temperaments, and to master circumstances. But *the* reason why we are troubled and careful about the things of this life, lies here, that our hearts have got an earthly direction, that we are at bottom heathenish in our lives, and in our desires. It is the very characteristic of the Gentile (that is to say, of the heathen) that earth should bound his horizon. It is the very characteristic of the worldly man that all his anxieties on the one hand, and all his joys on the other, should be "cribbed, cabined, and confined" within the narrow sphere of the Visible. When a Christian is living in the foreboding of some earthly sorrow to come down upon him, and is feeling as if there would be nothing left if some earthly treasure were swept away, is it not, in the very root of it, idolatry—worldly-mindedness? Is it not clean contrary to all our profession that for us "there is none upon earth that we desire besides Thee"? Anxious care rests upon a basis of heathen worldly-mindedness.

Anxious care rests upon a basis, too, of heathen misunderstanding of the character of God. "*Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things.*" The heathen thought of God is that He is far removed from our perplexities, either ignorant of our struggles, or unsympathising with them. The Christian has the double

armour against anxiety—the name of the Father, and the conviction that the Father's knowledge is co-extensive with the Father's love. He who calls us His children thoroughly understands what His children want. And so, anxiety is contrary to the very name by which we have learned to call God, and to the pledge of pitying care and perfect knowledge of our frame which lies in the words "our Father." Our Father is the name of God, and our Father intensely cares for us, and lovingly does all things for us.

And then, still further, Christ points out here, not only what is the real root of this solicitous care—something very like worldly-mindedness, heathen worldly-mindedness; but He points out what is the one counterpoise of it—*seek first the kingdom of God.* It is of no use only to tell men that they *ought* to trust, that the birds of the air might teach them to trust, that the flowers of the field might preach resignation and confidence to them. It is of no use to attempt to scold them into trust, by telling them that distrust is heathenish! You must fill the heart with a supreme and transcendent desire after the one supreme object; and then there will be no room and leisure left for the anxious care after the lesser. Have inwrought into your being, Christian man, the opposite of that heathen over-regard for earthly things. "Seek first the kingdom of God." Let all your spirit be stretching itself out towards that Divine and blessed reality, longing to be a subject of that kingdom, and a possessor of that righteousness; and "the cares that infest the day" shall steal away from out of the sacred pavilion of your believing spirit. Fill your heart with desires after

what is worthy of desire; and the greater having entered in, all lesser objects will rank themselves in the right place, and the "glory that excelleth" will outshine the seducing brightness of the paltry present. Oh! it is want of love, it is want of earnest desire, it is want of firm conviction that God, God only, God by Himself, is enough for me, that make me careful and troubled. And therefore, if I could only attain unto that sublime and calm height of perfect conviction, that He is sufficient for me, that He is with me for ever,—the satisfying object of my desires and the glorious reward of my searchings,—let life and death come as they may; let riches, poverty, health, sickness, all the antitheses of human circumstances storm down upon me in quick alternation, yet in them all I shall be content and peaceful. God is beside me! And His presence brings in its train whatsoever things I need. You cannot cast out the sin of foreboding thoughts by any power short of the entrance of Christ and His love. The blessings of faith and felt communion leave no room nor leisure for anxiety.

Finally, Christ here tells us, that thought for the morrow is CONTRARY TO ALL THE SCHEME OF PROVIDENCE, WHICH SHOWS IT TO BE VAIN. "*The morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*"

I interpret these two clauses as meaning this: To-morrow has anxieties enough of its own, after and in spite of all the anxieties about it to-day by which you try to free it from care when it comes. *Every* day—every day will have its evil, have it to the end. And every day will have evil enough for all the strength that

a man has to cope with it. So that it just comes to this: Anxiety,—it is all vain. After all your careful watching for the corner of the heaven where the cloud is to come from, there *will be* a cloud, and it will rise somewhere, but you never know in what quarter. The morrow shall have its own anxieties. After all your fortifying of the castle of your life, there will be some little postern left unguarded, some little weak place in the wall left uncommanded by a battery; and there, where you never looked for him, the inevitable invader will come in! After all the plunging of the hero in the fabled waters that made him invulnerable, there was the little spot on the heel, and the arrow found its way *there!* There is nothing certain to happen, says the proverb. but the unforeseen. To-morrow *will have* its cares, spite of anything that anxiety and foreboding can do. It is God's law of Providence that a man shall be disciplined by sorrow; and to try to escape from that law by any forecasting prudence, is utterly hopeless, and madness.

And what does your anxiety do? It does not empty to-morrow, brother, of its sorrows; but, ah! it empties to-day of its strength. It does not make you escape the evil, it makes you unfit to cope with it when it comes. It does not bless to-morrow, and it robs to-day. For every day has its own burden. Sufficient for each day is the evil which properly belongs to it. Do not add to morrow's to to-day's. Do not drag the future into the present. The present has enough to do with its own proper concerns. We have always strength to bear the evil when it comes. We have not strength to bear the foreboding of it. As thy day, thy strength shall be. In

strict proportion to the existing exigencies will be the God-given power; but if you cram and condense to-day's sorrows by experience, and to-morrow's sorrows by anticipation, into the narrow round of the one four-and-twenty hours, there is no promise that as *that* day thy strength shall be! God gives us (His name be praised!) —God gives us power to bear all the sorrows of His making; but He does not give us power to bear the sorrows of our own making, which *the anticipation* of sorrow most assuredly is.

Then: contrary to the lessons of Nature, contrary to the teachings of Religion, contrary to the scheme of Providence; weakening your strength, distracting your mind, sucking the sunshine out of every landscape, and casting a shadow over all the beauty—the curse of our lives is that heathenish, blind, useless, faithless, needless anxiety in which we *do* indulge. Look forward, my brother, for God has given you that royal and wonderful gift of dwelling in the future, and bringing all its glories around your present. Look forward! not for life, but for heaven; not for food and raiment, but for the righteousness after which it is blessed to hunger and thirst, and wherewith it is blessed to be clothed. Not for earth, but for heaven, let your forecasting gift of prophecy come into play. Fill the present with quiet faith, with patient waiting, with honest work, with wise reading of God's lessons of nature, of providence, and of grace, all of which say to us, Live in God's future, that the present may be bright: work in the present, that the future may be certain! *They* may well look around in expectation, sunny and unclouded, of a blessed time to come,

whose hearts are already "fixed, trusting in the Lord." He to whom there is a present Christ, and a present Spirit, and a present Father, and a present forgiveness, and a present redemption, may well live expiating in all the glorious distance of the unknown to come, sending out (if I may use such a figure)—sending out from his placid heart over all the weltering waters of this lower world, the peaceful seeking dove, his meek Hope, that shall come back again from its flight with some palm-branch broken from the trees of Paradise between its bill. And he that has *no* such present, *has* a future, dark, chaotic, heaving with its destructive ocean; and over it there goes for ever—black-pinioned, winging its solitary and hopeless flight, the raven of his anxious thoughts, and finds no place to rest, and comes back again to the desolate ark with its foreboding croak of evil in the present and evil in the future. Live in Christ, "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," and *His* presence shall make all *your* past, present, and future—memory, enjoyment, and hope—to be bright and beautiful, because all are centered in Him!

WEIGHTS AND SINS.

HEBREWS xii. 1.

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.

THERE is a regular series of thoughts in this clause, and in the one or two which follow it. "*Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,—looking unto Jesus.*" That is to say, If we would run well, we must run *light;* If we would run light, we must look to Christ. The central injunction is, "Let us run with patience;" the only way of doing that is the "laying aside *all* weights and sin;" and the only way of laying aside the weights and sins is, "looking unto Jesus."

Of course, the Apostle does not mean some one special kind of transgression when he says, "the sin which doth so easily beset us." He is speaking about sin generically—all manner of transgression. It is not, as we sometimes hear the words misquoted, "*that* sin which doth *most* easily beset us." *All* sin is according to this passage a besetting sin. It is the characteristic

of every kind of transgression, that it circles us round about, that it is always lying in wait and lurking for us. The whole of it therefore, in all its species, is to be cast aside if we would run with patience this appointed race. But then, besides that, there is something else to be put aside as well as sin. There is "every weight" as well as every transgression—two distinct things, meant to be distinguished. The putting away of both of them is equally needful for the race. The figure is plain enough. We as racers must throw aside the garment that wraps us round—that is to say, "the sin that easily besets us;" and then, besides that, we must lay aside everything else which weights us for the race—that is to say, certain habits or tendencies within us.

We have, then, to consider these three points;—First, There are hindrances which are not sins. Secondly, If we would run, we must put aside these. And lastly, If we would put them aside, we must look to Christ.

In the first place, THERE ARE HINDRANCES WHICH ARE NOT SINS. The distinction which the writer draws is a very important one. Sin is that which, by its very nature, in all circumstances, by whomsoever done, without regard to consequences, is a transgression of God's law. A "weight" is that which, allowable in itself, legitimate, perhaps a blessing, the exercise of a power which God has given us—is, for some reason a hindrance and impediment in *our* running the heavenly race. The one word describes the action or habit by its inmost essence, the other describes it by its accidental consequences. Sin is sin, whosoever does it; but weights may be weights to me, and not weights to you. Sin is sin, in

whatever degree it is done ; but weights may be weights when they are in excess, and helps, not hindrances, when they are in moderation. The one is a legitimate thing, turned to a false use ; the other is always, and everywhere, and by whomsoever performed, a transgression of God's law.

Then, what are these weights? The first step in the answer to that question is to be taken by remembering that, according to the image of this text, we carry them about *with* us, and we are to put them away from ourselves. It is fair to say then, that the whole class of weights are not so much external circumstances which may be turned to evil, as the feelings, and habits of mind by which we abuse God's great gifts and mercies, and turn that which was ordained to be for life into death. The renunciation that is spoken about is not so much the putting away from ourselves of certain things lying round about us, that *may become temptations ;* as the putting away of the dispositions within us which *make these things temptations.* The other is, of course, included as well ; but if we want to understand the true depth of the doctrine of self-denial and self-sacrifice which is taught here, we must remember that the sin and the weights alike lie within our own hearts—that they are our feelings, not God's perfect gifts—that they are our abuse of God's benefits, not the benefits which are given to us for our use. We shall have to see, presently, that by the power which we possess of turning all these outward blessings of God's hands into occasion for transgression, God's most precious endowments may become weights—but let us observe that, accurately and to begin with, the text

enjoins us to put away what cleaves to us, and is in us, not what is lying round about us.

Then, if it be mainly and primarily, legitimate feelings and thoughts, abused and exaggerated, which make the weights that we are to lay aside, what are the things which may thus become weights? Oh, brethren! a little word answers that. Everything. It is an awful and mysterious power that which we all possess, of perverting the highest endowments, whether of soul or of circumstances, which God has given us, into the occasions for faltering, and falling back in the Divine life. Just as men, by devilish ingenuity, can distil poison out of God's fairest flowers, so we can do with everything that we have, with all the richest treasures of our nature, with the hearts which He has given us that we may love Him with them; with the understandings which He has bestowed upon us, that we may apprehend His Divine truth and His wonderful counsel with them; with these powers of work in the world which He has conferred upon us, that by them we may bring to Him acceptable service and fitting offering; and, in like manner, with all the gladness and grace with which He surrounds our life, intending that out of it we should draw ever occasions for thankfulness, reasons for trust, helps towards God, ladders to assist us in climbing heavenward. Ah! and because we cleave to them too much, because we cleave to them not only in a wrong degree but in a wrong manner (for that is the deepest part of the fault) we may make them all hindrances. So, for instance, in a very awful sense is fulfilled that threatening, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household," when we make those that we love

best our idols, not because we love them too well, but because we love them apart from God; when instead of drawing from those that are dear to us—our husbands, and wives, and children, and parents, and friends, and every other tender name—lessons of God's infinite goodness, and reasons why our hearts should flow perpetually with love to Him,—we stay with them, and hang back from God, and forget that His love is best, His heart deepest, and His sufficiency our safest trust. That is one single instance; and as it is in that sacredest of regions, so is it in all others. Every blessing, every gladness, every possession, external to us, and every faculty and attribute within us, we turn into heavy weights that drag us down to this low spot of earth. We make them all sharp knives, with which we clip the wings of our heavenward tendencies, and then we grovel in the dust.

And now, if this be the explanation of what the Apostle means by "weights"—legitimate things that hinder us in our course towards God—there comes this second consideration, IF WE WOULD RUN, WE MUST LAY THESE ASIDE. Why must we lay them aside? The whole of the Christian's course is a fight. We carry with us a double nature. The best of us know that "flesh lusts against spirit, and spirit against flesh." Because of that conflict, it follows that if ever there is to be a positive progress in the Christian race, it must be accompanied, and made possible, by the negative process of casting away and losing much that interferes with it. Yes! that race is not merely the easy and natural unfolding of what is within us. The way by which we come to "the measure of the stature of perfect men" in Christ,

is not the way by which these material bodies of ours grow up into their perfectness. They have but to be nourished, and they grow. "The blade and the ear, and the full corn in the ear," come by the process of gradual growth and increase. That law of growth is used by our Lord as a description, but only as a partial description, of the way by which the kingdom of Christ advances in the heart. There is another side to it as well as that. The kingdom advances by warfare as well as by growth. It would be easy if it were but a matter of getting more and more; but it is not that only. Every step of the road, you have to cut your way through opposing foes. Every step of the road has to be marked with the blood that comes from wounded feet. Every step of the road is won by a tussle and a strife. There is no spiritual life without dying, there is no spiritual growth without putting off "the old man with his affections and lusts." The hands cannot move freely until the bonds be broken. The new Life that is in us cannot run with patience the race that is set before it, until the old Life that is in us is put down and subdued. And if we fancy that we are to get to heaven by a process of persistent growth, without painful self-sacrifice and martyrdom, we know nothing about it. That is not the law. For every new step that we win in the Christian course there must have been the laying aside of something. For every progress in knowledge, there must have been a sacrifice and martyrdom of our own indolence, of our own pride, of our own blindness of heart, of our own perverseness of will. For every progress in devout emotion, there must have been a crucifying and slaying of our earthly affections, of our

wavering hearts that are drawn away from God by the sweetness of this world. For every progress in strenuous work for God, there must have been a slaying of the selfishness which urges us to work in our own strength and for our own sake. All along the Christian course there must be set up altars to God on which you sacrifice yourselves, or you will never advance a step. The old legend that the Grecian host lay weather-bound in their port, vainly waiting for a wind to come and carry them to conquest; and that they were obliged to slay a human sacrifice ere the heavens would be propitious and fill their sails,—may be translated into the deepest verity of the Christian life. We may see in it that solemn lesson —no prosperous voyage, and no final conquest until the natural life has been offered up on the altar of hourly self-denial. That self-denial must reach beyond gross and undoubted sins. *They* must be swept away, of course, but deeper than these must the sacrificial knife strike its healing wound. If you would "run with patience," you must "lay aside every weight," as well as "the sin which so easily besets you."

So much for the *why;* well, then, *how* is this laying aside to be performed? There are two ways by which this injunction of my text may be obeyed. The one is, *by getting so strong that the thing shall not be a weight, though we carry it;* and the other is, that feeling ourselves to be weak, *we take the prudent course of putting it utterly aside.* Or, to turn that into other words: the highest type of the Christian character would be, that we should, as the Apostle says, "use the world without abusing it"—that "they who possess should be as though they

possessed not; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not." The noblest style of a Christian would be a man, who, exercising all the faculties which God had given him, and enjoying all the blessings wherewith God had surrounded him, walked his Christian course like some of those knights of old, lightly bearing his heavy mail, not feeling it a burden, but strong enough to bear the massive breast-plate and to wield the ponderous sword, and fitted for his rough warfare by it all. It would be possible, perhaps, some day for us to come to this—that inasmuch as it is the feelings within us which make the weights, and not the objects without us,—we should keep and enjoy the blessings and the gladness that we possess, and yet never thereby be thwarted or stayed in our journey heavenward. It would be the highest condition. I suppose we shall come to it yonder, where there will no longer be any need to maim ourselves that we may "enter into life," but where all the maimings that were done in this world for the sake of entering into life, shall be compensated and restored, and each soul shall stand perfect and complete, wanting nothing.

But, alas! though that course be the highest, the abstract best, the thing for which we ought to strive and try; it is not the course for which the weakness and inaptness of the most of us makes us strong enough. And, therefore, seeing that we have a nature so weak and feeble, that temptations surround us so constantly, that so many things legitimate become to us harmful and sinful, —the path of prudence, the safe path, is absolutely and

utterly to put them away from us, and have nothing to do with them.

Of course, there are many duties which, by our own sinfulness, we make weights, and we dare not, and we cannot if we would, lay *them aside*. A man, for instance, is born into certain circumstances, wherein he must abide; he has "a calling whereunto he is called." Your trade is a weight, your daily occupations are weights. The spirit of this commandment before us is not, "Leave your plough, and go up into the mountain to pray." Again, a man finds himself surrounded by friends and domestic ties. He dare not, he must not, he cannot, shake himself free from these. There are cases in which to put away the occupation that has become a weight,—to sacrifice the blessing that has become a hindrance,—to abstain from the circumstances which clog and impede our Divine life,—is a sin. Where God sets us, we *must* stand, if we die. What God has given us to do, we *must* do. The *duties* that in our weakness become impediments and weights, we *must not* leave.

But for all besides these, anything which, I know, has become a snare to me—unless it be something in the course of my simple duty, or unless it be some one of those relations of life which I cannot get rid of; I must have done with it! It may be sweet, it may be very dear, it may lie very near thy heart, it may be a part of thy very being:—never mind, put it away! If God has said to you, There, my child, stand there, surrounded by temptations!—then, like a man, stand to your colours, and do not take these words as if they said,—I am to

leave a place because I find myself too weak to resist—a place in which God, for the good of others or for the good of myself, has manifestly set me. But for all other provinces of life, if I feel myself weak I shall be wise to fly. As Christ has said, "If thy hand offend thee," put it down on the block there, and take the knife in the other, "and cut it off:" it is better, it is *better* for thee to go into life with that maimed and bleeding stump, an imperfect man, than with all thy natural capacities and powers to be utterly lost at the last! And some of us, perhaps, may feel that these solemn lessons apply not only to affection and outward business. I may be speaking to some young man to whom study, and thought, are a snare. I know that I am saying a grave thing, but I do say, In that region too, the principle applies. Better be ignorant, and saved, than wise, and lost. Better a maimed man in Christ's fold, than a perfect man, if that were possible, outside of it.

I know that there is a large field for misconception and misapplication, in the settlement of the practical question —Which of my weights arise from circumstances that I dare not seek to alter, and which from circumstances that I dare not leave unaltered? There is a large margin left for the play of honesty of purpose, and plain common sense, in the fitting of such general maxims to the shifting and complicated details of an individual life. But no laws can be laid down to save us that trouble. No man can judge for another about this matter. It must be our own sense of what harms our spiritual life, and not other people's notions of what is likely to harm either theirs or ours, that guides us. What *by experience* I find does me

harm, let me give up! No man has a right to come to me and say, *There* is a legitimate thing, an indifferent thing; it is not a sin; there is not in it, in itself, the essential element of transgression; but you must forsake it, because it is a weight to other people! To my own master I stand or fall. The commandment is, Have no weights! But the way to fulfil that commandment—whether by rejecting the thing altogether, or by keeping it, and yet not letting it be a weight, that is a matter for every one's own conscience, for every one's own judgment and practical prudence, guided by the Spirit of God, to determine. The obedience to the commandment is a simple matter of loyalty to Christ. But the manner of obedience is to be fixed by Christian wisdom. And remember that on both sides of the alternative there are dangers. There is danger in the too great freedom which says, I am strong; I can venture to do this thing—another man cannot—and I *will* do it! There is a danger on the other side in saying, We are all weak, and we will forsake all these things together! The one class of moralists are apt to confound their own unsanctified inclinations with the dictates of Christian freedom. The other class are apt to confound their own narrowness with the commandments of God. The one class are apt to turn their liberty into a cloak of licentiousness. The other class are apt to turn their obligation into a yoke which neither they nor their disciples are able to bear. The Apostle pointed out the evils which these two ways of dealing with things indifferent are apt to foster when he said to those who adopt the one, "Let not him that eateth *despise* him that eateth not;" and to those who

adopt the other, "Let not him which eateth not *judge* him that eateth." That is to say, on the one hand, beware of the fancied superiority to the weaknesses and narrowness of your more scrupulous brother, which is prone to creep into the hearts of the more liberal and strong. Remember that perhaps the difference between you is not all in your favour. It may be that what you call over-scrupulous timidity is the fruit of a more earnest Christian principle than yours; and that what you call in yourself freedom from foolish scruples, is only the result of a less sensitive conscience, not of a more robust Christianity. Then for the other class, the lesson is, "Let not him which eateth not, *judge* him that eateth." Judge not from the height of your superior self-denial your brother who allows himself what you avoid. Your besetting sin is self-righteous condemnation of those who perhaps, after all, are wiser as well as wider than you, and who in their strength may be able to walk as near to God on a road which to you would be full of perils, as you are in the manner of life which you know to be needful for you. Let us all remember, besides, that a thing which to ourselves is no weight, may yet be right for us to forsake, out of true and tender brotherly regard to others who, weaker than we, or perhaps more conscientious than we, could not do the same thing without damaging their spirits and weakening their Christian life. "Him that is weak in the faith, receive." Him that is weak in the faith, help. And in all these matters indifferent, which are weights to one and not weights to another, let us remember, first, for ourselves, that a weight retained is a sin; and let us remember, next, for others, that they

stand not by our experience, but by their own; and that we are neither to judge their strength, nor to offend their weakness.

And now, in the last place: THIS LAYING ASIDE OF EVERY WEIGHT IS ONLY POSSIBLE BY LOOKING TO CHRIST. That self-denial of which I have been speaking has in it no merit, no worthiness. The man that practises it is not a bit better than the man that does not, except in so far as it is a preparation for greater reception of the spiritual life. Some people suppose that when they have laid aside a weight, conquered a hindrance, given up some bad habit, they have done a meritorious thing. Well, we are strengthened, no doubt, by the very act; but then, it is of no use at all except in so far as it makes us better fitted for the positive progress which is to come after it. What is the use of the racer betaking himself to the starting-post, and throwing aside every weight, and then standing still? He puts aside his garments *that he may run.* We empty our hearts; but the empty heart is dull, and cold, and dark: we empty our hearts that Christ may fill them.

That is not all: Christ must have begun to fill them before we can empty them. "Looking to Jesus" is the only means of thorough-going, absolute self-denial. All other surrender than that which is based upon love to Him, and faith in Him, is but surface work, and drives the subtle disease to the vitals. The man that tries, by paring off an excrescence here, and giving up a bad habit there, to hammer and tinker and cut himself into the shape of a true and perfect man, may do it outwardly. He will scarcely do that, but it is possible he

may partially. And then, what has he made himself? "A whited sepulchre;" outside,—adorned, beautiful, clean; inside,—full of rottenness and dead men's bones! The self that was beaten in the open field of outward life, retires, like a defeated army, behind broad rivers; and concentrates itself in its fortresses, and prepares hopefully for a victorious resistance in the citadel of the heart.

My brother, if you would "run with patience the race that is set before you," you must "lay aside every weight." If you would lay aside every weight, you must look to Christ, and let His love flow into thy soul. Then, self-denial will not be self-denial. It will be blessing and joy, sweet and easy. Just as the old leaves drop naturally from the tree when the new buds of spring begin to put themselves out, let the new affection come and dwell in thy heart, and expel the old. "Lay aside every weight"—"looking unto Jesus." Then, too, you will find that the sacrifice and maiming of the old man has been the perfecting of *the man.* You will find that whatever you give up for Christ you get back from Christ, better, more beautiful, more blessed, hallowed to its inmost core, a joy and a possession for ever. For He will not suffer that any gift laid upon His altar shall not be given back to us. He will have no maimed man in His service. So, the hand that is cut off, the eye that is plucked out, the possessions that are rendered up, the idols that are slain,—they are all given back to us again when we stand in God's own light in glory—perfect men, made after the image of Christ, and surrounded with all possessions transfigured and glorified in the light

of God. "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

FAITHFUL IN LITTLE, FAITHFUL IN MUCH.

ST. LUKE xvi. 10.

He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

WHATEVER difficulties may belong to the interpretations of the parable of which this saying is the close (and they are great), the general scope of it can scarcely be mistaken.

The unjust steward wastes his lord's goods, and then, when about to be turned out of his office, makes friends by the crafty and dishonest use of them. His lord, who suffered by his extravagance and dishonesty, still commends his shrewdness. Our Lord lifts this illustration into the higher regions of the Christian life. We are stewards, we can employ our Master's goods for our own well-being. So far from that being dishonesty, it is the very purpose for which we receive them. The lord whose goods were squandered and misappropriated could not but let his appreciation of the shrewdness overcome his displeasure at the injustice. How much more in the highest verities of the spiritual life, does the approbation of the Lord follow that right, honest use of external goods which converts them into means of securing for ourselves

everlasting friends, and immortal helpers! There is no question of dishonesty or misappropriation here. "I say unto *you*, I the true Lord, to you my stewards—Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations." How to do it is another matter; but the main point of the parable seems plainly to be—Earthly possessions considered as helps and means to spiritual blessings.

There are three very remarkable descriptions applied to these worldly goods, in contrast with the spiritual blessings which they may help to bring to us, in the course of enforcing this truth. Our Lord calls them "that which is least," "the unrighteous mammon," "that which is another man's," and insists that a faithful use of these will lead to a blessed possession of the contrasted spiritual wealth—that which is greatest, the true riches, that which is your own.

We cannot now dwell upon these very significant and suggestive designations. All external good, all which a man has, is the lesser; the inward possessions, that which he is, are the greater. The greatest things of this outward world are small compared with the soul. Faith, love, hope, these are the greatest possessions. All this world's wealth is deceptive and illusory if it be regarded and followed for its own sake. When so pursued, it leads to unrighteousness. Often it is won by fraud. Dishonesty and injustice are attracted by it, and busy about it. To possess God and godlike characters—that is the "durable riches and righteousness." Worldly goods fly from hand to hand. Even when they remain in one man's posses-

sion for a lifetime, he and they belong to different orders of things—and remain foreign to each other. Possession of these can never be thorough, permanent. The true riches are meant for a man. They enter into the very substance of his being, and become interwoven with himself. They can never pass from him.

So much then for the original use of the words before us. But, like all Christ's words, they are like a jewel with many facets, which catches light at many different angles. Leaving the immediate subject of the antithesis here of least and greatest, and the immediate application of my text to the spiritual benefits that come from a right use of worldly wealth, we wish to take the words as a general truth, applying it to the general subject of faithfulness in great and in small matters.

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" seems to declare that true fidelity takes no account of the apparent magnitude of the actions in which it is employed; that true fidelity in the smallest things is harder than fidelity in the greatest; and that faithfulness in thy little sphere will fit thee for, and therefore will secure thy possessing a larger and nobler sphere in God's own good time. "He that is faithful in the least is faithful also in much;" therefore all fidelity is one; therefore the smallest includes the greatest; therefore the smallest prepares for the greatest.

Now let us look, for a moment or two, at these three principles. First, from the highest point of view, TRUE FAITHFULNESS KNOWS NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN GREAT AND SMALL DUTIES. From the highest point of view—that is, from God's point of view: to Him, nothing is

great, nothing small, as *we* measure it. The worth and the quality of an action depends on its motive only, and not at all on its prominence, or on any other of the accidents which we are always apt to adopt as the tests of the greatness of our deeds. The largeness of the consequences of anything that we do, is no measure of the true greatness or true value of it. So it is in regard to God himself, and His doings. To Him, for His loftiness, there is nothing high; to Him, for His gentleness, there is nothing low. He as gladly stands by the sick-bed and binds up the broken-hearted, as He "telleth the number of the stars." All that vulgar error into which we are ever falling—the measuring of the magnitude by the apparent consequences of our deeds, oh! it is the very ruin of all true strength, and of all true obedience too. In one respect nothing is great, nothing is small, except according as the reason for which I do it is lofty, because it is obedience to God; or is lowly and mean, because it is pleasure to myself. In another respect everything that a man can do is great and awful. All the beatings of that heart, all the workings of that nature, are terrible with the light of immortality, splendid and awful with the irradiation of immortal consequences. I have a soul that lives for ever, and I can pour that immortal being into every deed that I do. What *can* be little to the making of which there goes the force of a soul that can know God, and must abide for evermore? Nothing is small that a spirit can do. Nothing is small that can be done from a mighty motive. But even when we adopt the distinction of great and small in regard to men's actions, true fidelity must make no distinction in regard to

the imperative nature of duty in the small as in the great. The least action of life can be as surely done from the loftiest motive, as the highest and the noblest. Faithfulness measures acts as God measures them. True conscientiousness deals with our duties as God deals with them. Duty is duty, conscience is conscience, right is right, and wrong is wrong, whatever sized type they be printed in. "Large" or "small" are not words for the vocabulary of conscience. It knows only two words—right and wrong. And, just as the quality of life may be as perfect in the minutest animalculæ of which there may be millions in a cubic inch, and generations may die in an hour—just as perfect in the smallest insect as in "behemoth, biggest born of earth;" so righteousness may be as completely embodied, as perfectly set forth, as fully operative, in the tiniest action that I can do, as in the largest that an immortal spirit can be set to perform. The circle that is in a gnat's eye is as true a circle as the one that holds within its sweep all the stars; and the sphere that a dew-drop makes is as perfect a sphere as that of the world. All duties are the same which are done from the same motive; all acts which are not so done are alike sins.

This thought, my brethren, binds together in a very terrible unity all acts of transgression, and in a very blessed oneness all acts of obedience. The Bible says, a man that breaks one point of God's law, breaks it all. "If thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor"—of the single commandment? No! thou art a transgressor "of the whole law!" Like some of those creeping weeds that lie underground, and

put up a little leaf here, and another one there; and you dig down, fancying that their roots are short, but you find that they go creeping and tortuous below the surface, and the whole soil is full of them,—so all sin holds on by one root. "He that is unjust in the least" is unjust,—and there is an end to it! Therefore, seeing that he is an unjust man, he will be unjust in "the much" when it serves his purpose and he gets the chance!

And on the other hand, this thought binds together in a blessed oneness all acts of obedience to God's merciful will, all acts of loyal submission to Christ's commanding love. They, too, belong to one common root. They, too, are members of one clustered whole. The poor woman that sits quietly in her garret, and works away there, patient and unknown, and poverty-stricken, at the small tasks and monotonous trivialities of her daily life, is doing the same thing as Paul when he stands up before Cæsar, or as the martyr when he dies at the stake. Faithfulness is one in every region. Large or small is of no account to the sovereign eye. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward," because though not gifted with the prophet's tongue, he has the prophet's spirit, and does his small act of hospitality from the very same prophet-impulse which in another, who is more loftily endowed, leads to burning words and mighty deeds. For all duty is one; and the petty distinctions of great and small dwindle all away into nothing at the sight of that one supreme word, "This is the will of the Lord," and, "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men!"

And should not this principle send us about our daily

life with a cheerfulness and a power to which we are much strangers at present? Why is it that Christian people so constantly break down in the minutiæ of obedience, and in the little things of their ordinary doing, but because, amongst other reasons, we have got hold of that notion that small things are less important than great ones, and that great actions need mightier motives and larger faith than the small? Oh! it irradiates all our days with lofty beauty, and it makes them all hallowed and divine, when we feel that not the apparent greatness, not the prominence nor noise with which it is done, nor the external consequences which flow from it, but the motive from which it flowed determines the worth of our deed in God's eyes. Faithfulness *is* faithfulness, on whatsoever scale it be set forth!

Then in the second place, in another point of view, FAITHFULNESS IN SMALL DUTIES IS EVEN GREATER THAN FAITHFULNESS IN GREAT. We may legitimately adopt the distinction of great and small—a distinction which is founded upon truth—in regard to the different kinds of duties which devolve upon us in our daily life, if only we remember that all such distinctions are superficial; that the great and the small, after all, run down into one. Remembering *that* we may then fairly measure our different actions by two standards: one is *the apparent importance of the consequences, and the apparent splendour of the act;* and the other is, *the difficulties with which we have to contend in doing it.* Great things that *are* great because they seem to have very wide reaching consequences, and seem to be lifted up upon a pinnacle of splendour; or great things that *are* great because there

was severe resistance that had to be overcome before we did them, and sore temptations that were dragging us down on our way to the performance of them,—are really great and lofty. Only, the little duties that had no mighty consequences, no glittering splendour about them, and the little duties that had not much strife with temptation before they were done, may be as great, as great in God's eye, as great perhaps in their consequences, as great in their rewards, as in the other.

Still, keeping the distinction for what it is worth, and remembering that it is only surface, I think it is quite true that it is a great deal harder, in ordinary cases, for us to go on doing the little things well, than for us to do the great things well. The one are done with scarcely any notice, "there are none to praise, and very few to love" us because of them. The other are often done by men ringed round with applauding crowds, or stimulated by the consciousness of hostile zeal, and hoping for honourable commemoration in coming times. The one are constantly recurring, and it is difficult to keep up, through all the monotony of daily life, the force of the one mighty motive, "the love of Christ constraineth me." The other come but rarely, even in the most eventful career, and it is comparatively easy to act nobly under the stimulus of extraordinary excitement, when the soul is all on fire, as a soldier will strike with giant strength in the crisis of a fight, and for the moment will be all unconscious of his bleeding wounds. The one seem to be of less importance because of their frequency, and the apparent insignificance of their results, and it is hard to feel it worth while to bring great principles to bear upon small duties. The

other proclaim their importance on their very fronts, and call up at once our most vigorous energies, for they obviously can be done at all only by our utmost efforts.

Ah, my brother, it is a far harder thing, and it is a far higher proof of a thorough-going persistent Christian principle woven into the very texture of my soul, to go on plodding and patient, never taken by surprise by any small temptation, than to gather into myself the strength which God has given me, and, expecting some great storm to come down upon me, to stand fast and let it rage. It is a great deal easier to die *once* for Christ than to live *always* for Him. It is a great deal easier to do some single mighty act of self-surrender, than daily—unnoticed, patiently,—to "crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts." If you are saying to yourself, My life only affords scope for monotonous service and little deeds, ask yourself whether it is not harder, whether it is not more useful for the world, whether it is not more needful, therefore, that you should do the constant little things well, than that once in a lifetime you should do the great? All honour be to them who, spurred and stimulated by some sudden excitement, and borne up by the power that great sorrows and great difficulties bring, and consoled by the thought that the grief was but for a moment, and the glory would be for ever—have done and endured the things that have written their names high on the roll of the Christian Church! All honour be to the martyrs and the apostles—the Pauls, and the Peters, and the Luthers!—but no less honour to the quiet Johns, whose business was only to "tarry till I come!" All honour to those whose names are possessions to the whole Church for

ever! but no less honour to those whose names, forgotten on earth, are only written in the Lamb's book of life, and who, with no excitement, on no lofty pedestals, with no great crises, have gone on in Christian faithfulness, and by "patient continuance in well-doing," have sought for glory, honour, immortality, and have received eternal life! To keep ourselves clear from the world, never to break the sweet charities that bind together the circles of our homes, to walk within our houses with perfect hearts, to be honest over the pence as well as over the pounds, never to permit the little risings of momentary anger that seem but a trifle because they pass away so quickly, to do the small duties that recur with every beat of the pendulum, and that must be done by present force and by instantly falling back upon the loftiest principle, or they cannot be done at all,—these are as noble ways of glorifying Christ and being glorified in Him, as any to which we can ever attain.

Let us neither repine at our narrow spheres, nor fancy that we can afford to live carelessly in them because they *are* narrow. Some of us may be longing—passionately, impatiently, sinfully longing—for another kind of work, for a larger species of service, to do something that shall tell more widely upon the earth; and, may be thinking that this little task that we are set down to, this quiet, patient, right-doing in daily life, is very, very insignificant. And most of us are living not screwed up to the highest pitch; because we fancy that the duties are so easy. One of our wise old poets says—

> "Who keeps no guard upon himself, is slack,
> And rots to nothing at the next great thaw!"

"He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." It needs all your Christian principles, and it needs all the help that God's Holy Spirit will give you, to fit you to do the insignificant duties that are lying at your door to-day, and that will be waiting for you this morning when you leave this place, and go back to your quiet houses. You cannot afford to be supercilious over your smallest duties. You cannot afford to think, Ah! I have done them every day for the last twenty years, and it is a poor affair if I cannot do them now! Present grace, my brother, present help, the present realising of the solemnity of duty and the awfulness of sin; present dependence upon God's Holy Spirit and Christ's implanted righteousness—these alone will fit us to do the least things well, and these will lift us above, and make us able to do, the loftiest things too.

The smallest duties, then, are often harder—because of their apparent insignificance, because of their constant recurrence—harder than the great ones. But do not let us forget that if harder, they are on the whole more needful. The world has more need of a great number of Christian people doing little things like Christians, than it has need of one Apostle preaching like an Apostle, or one martyr dying like a martyr. As a means of spreading the Gospel, faithfulness in doing little things is a mightier engine than all the power of the pulpit or all the eloquence of a preacher. "From you," said an Apostle once, "from you the word of the Lord hath sounded out so that *we* need not speak anything." Those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary, and the less comely parts have more abundant

comeliness. That saying holds a principle true about the individual members of Christ's church, and true about the scale of all our Christian duties—that the insignificant things in their sum total, are worth more than the loftiest significant ones. The mass of trifles makes magnitude. The little things are greater than the great, because of their number. They are more efficacious than the single lofty acts. Like the air which in the lungs needs to be broken up into small particles, and diffused ere it parts with its vitalising principle to the blood, so the minute acts of obedience, and the exhibition of the power of the Gospel in the thousand trifles of Christian lives, permeating everywhere, will vitalise the world and will preach the Gospel in such a fashion as never can be done by any single and occasional, though it may seem to be more lofty and more worthy, agency. Honour the trifles, and you will find yourself right about the great things! If I may use the simple old English proverb, "Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves." Be "faithful in that which is least," and the accumulation of minute faithfulnesses will make the mighty faithfulness of a life.

Lastly: FAITHFULNESS IN THAT WHICH IS LEAST IS THE PREPARATION FOR, AND SECURES OUR HAVING A WIDER SPHERE IN WHICH TO OBEY GOD. I have already said that we may properly give some force to the distinction between great and small duties; and if we look at them either in reference to the apparent greatness of their consequences, or to the difficulty of doing them—then, in both of these aspects, it is true that he that is faithful in that which is least, will be fitted to be, and

will get the occasion for being, faithful in that which is greater. Of course, it is quite easy to see how, if once we are doing, what I have already said is the harder task —habitually doing the little things wisely and well, for the love of Christ and in the fear of God—we shall be fitted for the sorest sudden temptations, and shall be made able to perform far larger and far more apparently splendid acts. Every power strengthens by exercise. Everything that I do, I can do better next time because of the previous effort. Every temptation resisted weakens the force of all other temptations of every sort. Every time that a Christian acts for the sake of Christ, that motive is made stronger in his soul. Every time that a rebellious and seducing voice, speaking in his spirit, is withstood, his ear becomes more attuned to catch the lowest whisper of his Master's commandments, and his heart becomes more joyful and ready to obey. Every act of obedience smoothes the road for all that shall come after. *To get the habit* of being faithful wrought into our life, and becoming part of our second and truer self, that is a defence all but impregnable for us when the stress of the great trials comes, or when God calls us to lofty and hard duties.

And, on the other side, the same process exactly goes on to make men, by slow degrees, unfaithful in all. Tampering with a trifle; saying, Oh, it is a small matter, and I can venture it; or, It is a little thing, *too* little for mighty motives to be brought to bear upon it,—that ends in this—"unjust also in much." The habit of unfaithfulness, the habit of forgetting that I am a steward,—*that* grows as well as the better habit, and plunges us at last

deep down in the mire of constant forgetfulness and in the slippery places of constant disobedience. One of the Apocryphal books says a truth, "He that despiseth little things shall fall by little and little." "He that is unjust in the least," give him time, and he will be "unjust also in much." He that begins by one trembling step over the boundary that separates faithfulness from faithlessness, it is only a question of time how far will he go. He *is* across the boundary, and that is the thing! And so, just as two roads that diverge from each other at a very sharp angle, get the wider apart the further they go, till at last half a continent may be held betwixt them, —the little deflection from the narrow line of Christian duty and simple faithfulness, it is only God's mercy that will prevent it from leading thee away out, out, out into the waste plains and doleful wildernesses, where all sinful, and dark, and foul things dwell for ever! Take care of the small! A little faithfulness gives the *habit* of faithfulness, and fits for large duties. Small infidelities *are* infidelities, and will produce the greater. The little thief goes in at the narrow window, and opens the door for all the big ones. "He that is unjust in that which is least, is unjust also in much."

And as thus the smaller fits for the greater, on both sides, so also God is "not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love;" and whatsoever we are capable of doing for Him, depend upon it we shall get the opportunity of doing. The way to get ready for, and the way to ensure the possession of, the widest field for service, and the loftiest opportunities of doing His will, is faithfully to fill the narrow sphere in which He at

present sets us. The reward for work is, more work on earth and more work in heaven. And when the little candlestick has given "light to all that are in the house," God will not let any of His candles be lost, you may be sure, but He will set them up in some loftier candlestick, that they may ray out hospitable and inviting light unto wider circles, and bring in many from darkness and wandering. "Be of good cheer, Paul," said the vision to the Apostle; "thou hast borne witness for me at Jerusalem;" take, as the reward and seal of my approbation, this,—"thou shalt bear witness for me at Rome!" "Well done, good and faithful servant," said the Lord; "thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; have thou dominion over ten cities." Do the little, and God will provide the great. You have always as much to do as you have strength to do it with. If you want wider work and a larger sphere, and are longing for something greater, more noble, more splendid; if you are ambitious, or if you are discontented and supercilious about your daily duties,—remember this: if you do not begin at the bottom round of the ladder, you cannot reach the top. But if, by patient faith, by simple dependence upon Christ and His mercy, feeling yourself encompassed with an awful and impartial law of right which makes everything dreadful that is wrong, and everything noble that is obedience, you seek to execute God's will, loving the Lord that has done the smallest things for you,—the narrow sphere will widen and open itself; and lofty tasks, and glorious work, and sovereign authority shall be given to you in this life, and in that which is to come.

My brother, life is *all* great. Life is great because it is the aggregation of littles. As the chalk cliffs in the South, that rear themselves hundreds of feet above the crawling sea beneath, are all made up of the minute skeletons of microscopic animalculæ; so life, mighty and awful as having eternal consequences, life that towers beetling over the sea of eternity, is made up of these minute incidents, of these trifling duties, of these small tasks; and if thou art not "faithful in that which is least," thou art unfaithful in the whole.

He only is faithful that is full of faith. He only does the will of the Lord, and goes through life as a man ought to do, who goes through it trusting in Jesus Christ, and relying upon Him for power to fit him for all his tasks. He shall possess power to do thankfully the great and the little, seeing that the "love of Christ constraineth" him, and that whatsoever he doeth, he doeth heartily, as to the Lord Christ, and not unto men!

ENTRANCE INTO GOD'S REST.

HEBREWS iv. 9, 10.

There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God. For He that is entered into His rest, He also hath ceased from His own works, as God did from His.

WE lose much of the meaning of this passage by our superficial habit of transferring it to a future state. The ground of the mistake is in the misinterpretation of that word "remaineth;" which is taken to point to the "rest," after the sorrows of this life are all done with. Of course *there is* such a rest; but if we take the context of the passage, we cannot but recognise this as the truth that is taught here, that Faith, and not Death, is the gate to participation in Christ's rest—that the rest remained over after Moses and Judaism, but came into possession under and by Christ.

For the main scope of the whole passage is the elucidation of one of the points in which the writer asserts the superiority of Christ to Moses, of Christianity to Judaism. That old system, says he, had in it for its very heart a promise of *rest;* but it had only *a promise.* It could not *give* the thing that it held forth. It could not,

by the nature of the system. It could not, as is manifest from this fact,—that years after they had entered into possession of the land, years after the promise had been first given, the Psalmist represents the entrance into that rest as a privilege not yet realized, but waiting to be grasped by the men of his day whose hearts were softened to hear God's voice. David's words clearly, to the mind of the writer of the epistle, show that Canaan was not the promised "rest." David treats it as being obtained by obedience to God's word; as not possessed by the people, though they had the promised land. He treats it as then, in his own "day," still but a promise, and a promise which might not be fulfilled to his people if they hardened their hearts. All this carries the inference that the Mosaic system did not *give* the "rest" it promised. Hence, says the author of the Hebrews, that "rest" held forth from the beginning, gleaming before all generations of the Jewish people, but to them only a fair vision, remains unpossessed as yet, but to be possessed. God's word has been pledged. He has said that there shall be a share in His rest for His people. The ancient people did not get it. What then? Is God's promise thereby cancelled? "They could not enter in because of unbelief." But the unbelief of man shall not make the faith of God without effect. Therefore, as the eternal promise has been given, and they counted themselves unworthy, the Divine mercy which will find some to enter therein, and will not be baulked of its purposes, turns to the Gentiles; and the "rest" provided for the Jews first, but unaccepted by them, *remains* for all who believe to partake.

And, still further, the writer establishes the principle that the rest promised to the Jew remains yet to be inherited by the Christian, on a second ground: "*For*," says he, in the tenth verse of the chapter, "for He that is entered into His rest, He also has ceased from His own works, as God did from His." How is that a proof? It is not a proof that there is a rest for us, if you interpret it as people generally do. But it is so if you give to it what seems to be the correct interpretation—by referring it to Christ and Christ's heavenly condition. "He that has entered into His rest,"—that is Jesus Christ, "He has ceased from His own works"—His finished work of redemption—"as God did from His"—His finished work of creation. And there is the great proof that there is a rest for us: not only because Judaism did not bring it, but because Christ hath gone up on high. We have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens. Christ our Lord has entered into His rest,—parallel with the Divine tranquillity after Creation. And seeing that He possesses it, certainly we shall possess it if only we hold fast by Him. "There remains a rest"—proved by the fact that Christ hath gone into it, and carrying the inference, "Let *us* labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

We find here, then, three main points. First, the divine rest, God's and Christ's. Secondly, this divine rest, the pattern of what our life on earth may become. And lastly, this divine rest, the prophecy of what our life in heaven shall assuredly be.

In the first place, then, we have here, THE DIVINE

REST. "He hath ceased from His own works, as God did from His." The writer is drawing a parallel between God's ceasing from His creative work and entering into that Sabbath rest when He "saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good;" and Christ's ceasing from the work of redemption, and passing into the skies to the Sabbath of His everlasting repose.

I need not dwell at any length upon a matter which, after all speech, remains for us but very dimly intelligible —the rest of God—"My rest." That rest belongs necessarily to the Divine Nature. It is the deep tranquillity of a nature self-sufficing in its infinite beauty, calm in its everlasting strength, placid in its deepest joy, still in its mightiest energy; loving without passion, willing without decision or change, acting without effort; quiet, and moving everything; making all things new, and itself everlasting; creating, and knowing no diminution by the act; annihilating, and knowing no loss though the universe were barren and unpeopled. God is, God is everywhere, God is everywhere the same, God is everywhere the same infinite, God is everywhere the same infinite love and the same infinite self-sufficiency; therefore His very Being is rest. And yet that image that rises before us, statuesque, still in its placid tranquillity, is not repellent nor cold, is no dead marble likeness of life. That great ocean of the Divine Nature which knows no storm nor billow, is yet not a tideless and stagnant sea. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He loves. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He wills. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He acts. Mystery of mysteries, passing all understanding! And yet

He says, "They *shall enter into My rest!*" Now I believe, and I hope you believe, that the rest of Christ is like the rest of God, even in respect of this Divine and Infinite Nature. "He hath ceased from His works, *as* God did from His." Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Whatsoever you can predicate of the settled tranquillity, and stable, necessary, essential repose of a divine nature, *that* you can predicate of Christ our Redeemer, of Christ the Son of God.

But still further. Besides that deep and changeless repose which thus belongs to the Divine Nature, there is the other thought which perhaps comes more markedly out in the passage before us—that of a rest which is God's tranquil ceasing from His work, because God has perfected His work. When we read in the Old Testament, that at the end of the creative act, God rested upon the Sabbath day, and blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, of course the thing that comes into view is not a Divine nature wearied with toil and needing repose, but it is a Divine nature which has fully accomplished its intent, expressed its purpose, done what it meant to do, and rests from its working because it has embodied its ideal in its work. It is the proclamation, "This creation of Mine is all that I meant it to be—finished and perfect;" not the acknowledgment of an exhaustion of the creative energy which needs to reinvigorate its strength by repose after its mighty effort. The rest of God is the expression of the perfect Divine complacency in the perfect Divine work.

And, in like manner, as after that creative act there came the Sabbath, when He saw that it was all very good, and

the morning stars sang together for joy;—so after the mightier new-creative act of redemption, the Christ, who is Divine, ceased and held His hand, not because Bethlehem and Calvary had wearied Him, not because after pain He needed rest, not because the Cross had tasked His powers, and the suffering had strained His nature; but because all that had to be done *was* done, and He knew it—because redemption was completed. The Sabbath on which God rested from His work, and the new Sabbath on which Christ rose from the dead, the conqueror of Death, the destruction of sin, are parallel in this, that in either case the work *was done*, that in either case the Doer needed no repose after His finished task. And just as God, full of all the energy of being, operated unspent after creation, needed not the rest for His refreshment, but took it as the pledge and proclamation to the universe that all was done; so Christ, unwearied and unwounded from His dreadful close, and sore wrestle, with Sin and Death, sprung from the grave to the skies, and rests,—proclamation and token to the world that His work is finished, that the Cross is enough for the race for evermore, that all is complete, and man's salvation secured. *As* God hath ceased from His works, Christ hath ceased from His.

Still further: this Divine tranquillity—inseparable from the Divine nature, the token of the sufficiency and completeness of the Divine work—is also a rest that is full of work. When Christ was telling these Jews the principles of the Sabbath day, He said to them: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." The creative act is finished and God rests; but God, in resting, works;

even as God, in working, rests. Preservation is a continued creation. The energy of the Divine power is as mightily at work here now sustaining us in life, as it was when He flung forth stars and systems like sparks from a forge, and willed the universe into being. God rests, and in His rest, up to the present hour and for ever, God works. And, in like manner, Christ's work of redemption, finished upon the cross, is perpetually going on. Christ's glorious repose is full of energy for His people. He intercedes above. He works on them, He works through them, He works for them. The rest of God, the Divine tranquillity, is full of work.

There, then, is a parallel: the rest of the Father, who ceased from His work of creation, and continueth His work of preservation, parallel with that of the Son, who ceased from His work of sacrifice, and continueth His work of intercession and of sanctifying. These two are one. "My rest" is the rest of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Father. That still communion and that everlasting repose are a prophecy for our lives, brethren. The ancient promise, long repeated, has come sounding down through the echoing halls of the centuries, and rings in our ears as fresh as when first it was spoken, "There remaineth a rest for the people of God," they shall enter into the stillness and the secret of His tranquillity!

Then, in the second place, the text gives us, THE REST OF GOD AND OF CHRIST IS THE PATTERN OF WHAT OUR EARTHLY LIFE MAY BECOME. Like Christ, like God —can it be? It *can* be, with certain differences; but oh! the differences drop into insignificance when we

think of the resemblances. Whether a man is capable of knowing absolute truth or not, he is capable of coming into direct and personal contact with the absolute Reality, the Truth of Truth. And whether here below we can know anything about God as He is, or not, this at all events the New Testament teaches us, that we can come to be *like Him*—like Him in the substance of our souls; like Him—copy of His perfections; like Him—shadow and resemblance of some of His attributes. And here lies the foundation for the belief that we can "enter into His rest." We cannot possess that changeless tranquillity which knows no variations of purpose or of desire, but we can possess the stable repose of that fixed nature which knows one object, and one alone. We cannot possess that energy which, after all work, is fresh and unbroken; but we can possess that tranquillity which in all toil is not troubled, and after all work is ready for double service. We cannot possess that unwavering fire of a Divine nature which burns in love without flickering, which knows without learning, which wills without irresolution and without the act of decision; but we can come to love deeply, tranquilly, perpetually, we *can* come to know without questioning, without doubts, without darkness, in firm confidence of stable assurance, and so know with something like the knowledge of Him who knows things as they are; and we can come to will and resolve so strongly, so fixedly, so wisely, that there shall be no change of purpose, nor any vacillation of desire. In these ways, in shadow and copy, we can be like even the apparently incommunicable tranquillity which, like an atmosphere that

knows no tempests, belongs to and encircles the throne of God.

But, still further: Faith, which is the means of entering into rest, will—if only you cherish it—make your life no unworthy resemblance of His who, triumphant above, works for us, and, working for us, rests from all His toil. Trust Christ! is the teaching here. Trust Christ! and a great benediction of tranquil repose comes down upon thy calm mind and upon thy settled heart. Trust Christ! and so thy soul shall no longer be like "the sea that cannot rest," full of turbulent wishes, full of passionate desires that come to nothing, full of endless moanings, like the homeless ocean that is ever working and never flings up any product of its work but yeasty foam and broken weeds;—but thine heart shall become translucent and still, like some land-locked lake, where no winds rave nor tempests ruffle; and on its calm surface there shall be mirrored the clear shining of the unclouded blue, and the perpetual light of the sun that never goes down. Trust Christ! and rest is thine—rest from fear, rest from toil and trouble, rest from sorrow, rest from the tossings of thine own soul, rest from the tumults of thine own desires, rest from the stings of thine own conscience, rest from the seeking to work out a righteousness of thine own. Trust Christ, *cease* from "thine *own works*," forsake thine own doings, and abjure and abandon thine own righteousness; and though God's throne be far above thee, and the depth of that Being be incommunicable to and uncopyable by thee, yet a Divine likeness of His still, and blessed, and unbroken repose shall come down and lie—a solid and substantial thing—on

thy pure and calmed spirit. "There remaineth a rest for the people of God." Say then, My Lord rests and my Father: I will trust Him; I will rest in the Lord, and He shall keep me in perfect peace, because my mind is stayed on Him

Finally: THIS DIVINE REST is not only a pattern of what our earthly life may become, but it is A PROPHECY OF WHAT OUR HEAVENLY LIFE SHALL SURELY BE. I have said that the immediate reference of the passage is not to a future state. But that does not exclude the reference, unless, indeed, we suppose that the Christian's life on earth and his condition in heaven are two utterly different things, possessing no feature in common. The Bible presents a directly reverse notion to that. Though it gives full weight to all the differences which characterise the two conditions, yet it says, There is a basis of likeness between the Christian life on earth and the Christian life in heaven, so great as that the blessings which are predicated of the one belong to the other. Only here they are in blossom, sickly often, putting out very feeble shoots and tendrils; and yonder transplanted into their right soil, and in their native air with heaven's sun upon them, they burst into richer beauty, and bring forth fruits of immortal life. Heaven is the earthly life of a believer glorified and perfected. If here we by faith enter into the beginning of rest, yonder, through death with faith, we shall enter into the perfection of it.

We cannot speak wisely of that future when we speak definitely of it. All that I suggest now as taught us by this passage is, that heaven will be for us, rest in work

and work that is full of rest. Your Lord's heaven is not an idle heaven. Christ is gone up on high, having completed His work on earth, that He may carry on His work in heaven; and after the pattern and likeness of His glory and of His repose, shall be the repose and glory of the children that are with Him. He rests from His labours, and His works do follow Him. He sitteth at the right hand of God "expecting"—waiting patiently and in the confidence of assured triumph, "till His enemies become His footstool." But yet the dying martyr saw his Lord standing, not sitting, ready to help, and bending over him to welcome; and though He has ascended, and left the work of spreading the Gospel to be done on earth, "the Lord works with us" from His throne, nor is untouched by our troubles, nor idle in our toils. All the rest of that Divine tranquillity is rest in rapid, vigorous, perpetual motion. Ay, it is just as it is with physical things: the looker-on sees the swiftest motion as the most perfect rest. The wheel revolves so fast that the eye cannot discern its movements. The cataract foaming down from the hill-side, when seen from half-way across the lake, seems to stand a silent, still, icy pillar. The Divine work, because it is *such* work, is rest —tranquil in its energy, quiet in its intensity; because so mighty, therefore so still! That is God's heaven, Christ's heaven.

The heaven of all spiritual natures is not idleness. Man's delight is activity. The loving heart's delight is obedience. The saved heart's delight is grateful service. The joys of heaven are not the joys of passive contemplation, of dreamy remembrance, of perfect repose; but

they are described thus, "They rest not day nor night." "His servants serve Him, and see His face."

Yes, my brother, heaven is perfect "*rest*." God be thanked for all the depth of unspeakable sweetness which lies in that one little word, to the ears of all the weary and the heavy laden. God be thanked that the calm clouds which gather round the western, setting sun, and stretch their unmoving loveliness in perfect repose, and are bathed through and through with unflashing and tranquil light, seem to us in our busy lives and in our hot strife like blessed prophets of our state when we, too, shall lie cradled near the everlasting, unsetting Sun, and drink in, in still beauty of perpetual contemplation, all the glory of His face, nor know any more wind and tempest, rain and change. Rest in heaven—rest in God! Yes, but work in rest! Ah, that our hearts should grow up into an energy of love of which we know nothing here, and that our hands should be swift to do service, beyond all that could be rendered on earth,—that, never wearying, we should for ever be honoured by having work that never becomes toil nor needs repose; that, ever resting, we should ever be blessed by doing service which is the expression of our loving hearts, and the offering of our grateful and greatened spirits, joyful to us and acceptable to God,—*that* is the true conception of "the rest that remaineth for the people of God." Heaven is waiting for us—like God's, like Christ's—still in all its work, active in all its repose. See to it, my friend, that your life be calm because your soul is fixed, trusting in Jesus, who alone gives rest here to the heavy laden. Then your death will be but the passing from

one degree of tranquillity to another, and the calm face of the corpse, whence all the lines of sorrow and care have faded utterly away, will be but a poor emblem of the perfect stillness into which the spirit has gone. Faith is the gate to partaking in the rest of God on earth. Death with Faith is the gate of entrance into the rest of God in heaven.

THE CHOICE OF WISDOM.*

PROVERBS ix. 3, 4, *and* 16.

Wisdom crieth upon the highest places of the city, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither."— . . . . The foolish woman sitteth in the high places of the city, to call, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither."

I HAVE to speak, this evening, to the young. Now, I am not going to draw the motives with which I seek to influence you from the considerations that might seem appropriate to a New Year, such as the shortness of life and the certainty of death. Christianity is as needful for you to *live* by, young people, as to *die* by. It is quite as solemn a thing to say to you, "This year thou shalt *live*," as to say, "This year thou shalt *die*." We have a Gospel to preach, that claims, indeed, to be the only thing that can make a man die rightly; but which claims a higher glory than that—to be the only thing that can make him live rightly.

You observe that the texts I have chosen this evening are parts of that great contrast with which this Book of Proverbs (which, in passing, let me say, is emphatically a

* Preached to young men, on the first Sunday in January.

young man's book) opens. It sets before us one thing or other, wisdom or folly. The whole of the early chapters show us the picture of a lad, standing at the opening of his life, and round about him a variety of voices and inducements, some drawing him one way, and some drawing him another. They paint for us youth as it comes to us all, wooed by enticements of sinners, by siren songs from every side, exhorted by the grave words of a severer wisdom, counselled by a father's lips, implored by a mother's tears. To you, young men, these conflicting voices speak. Now, is it not a great gain that here we should get all these diverse appeals that are made to us from all sides, all the different ways which open out for us in the course of life, gathered up and packed together into two? Life is reduced to an alternative; there is clearly marked out for us all, at the beginning of our life, that all is one thing or other, wisdom or folly. Wisdom sits in the highest places of the city, and cries, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in *hither!*" Folly sits in the highest places of the city, and cries with the same invitation, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in *hither!*" And to these two voices, brethren, all the noise and tumult of life, and all the diverse voices in your own souls, may be reduced. They are all either the call of the Wisdom of God, or they are the call of Folly, sense and sin. So that if I may be allowed to put my sermon this evening—as I am speaking to young persons—in the shape of three advices, we shall get an opportunity of setting before you the whole force of this contrast that is in our text. Then, let me counsel you —not by the right of seniority, but by the right of

sympathy—to choose—make a choice, and stick to it; secondly, to choose wisdom;—and *lastly*, to choose wisdom now.

In the *first* place, CHOOSE. You say, "That is a vague advice." It is vague at present—at this stage of what I have to say to you; but one-half of the sins that men do would never have been done if they had attended to it. "More evil is wrought for want of thought, than is wrought for want of heart;" and although the singer meant more harm to *other* people, the principle is true in a wider sense. The curse of men—and of young people especially—is, that they drift into passions and habits before they know where they are; that they do not—calmly, and deliberately, and of set purpose—decide their course of action, until circumstances, and temptations, and opportunities, and I know not what shabby and contemptible influences, have decided it for them. And to put it upon no higher ground—it is a low and discreditable thing for men, old or young, that they should be the creatures and sport of the mere circumstances that lie round about them. My first desire about *you*, dear young friends, is to bring you up to this—that all your life shall have in it the deliberation and the resolve of a calm, settled choice—that you shall exercise the manly power that is given to you; and if you do a thing, shall do it because you have *resolved* to do it, and not because it was easier to do it than not to do it;—in a word, that you shall cease to be things, and that you shall become men. For here is the manliness of manhood, that a man has a reason for what he does, and has a will in doing it.

But what is the fact of the case to a godly and religious life? For one man that has fairly looked the alternative in the face, and said to himself, "I am standing now at a fork in the road. There is a narrow path that goes *that* way, and there is a broad one that goes *that* way; and, deliberately resolving, I turn aside into the broad and leave the narrow,"—for one man that of set purpose and with deliberate conviction has done the wrong thing because he made up his mind to do it, there are hundreds that do it carelessly, unthinkingly, weakly—none the less sinfully; but oh! far the less manfully. As the basis of all strong, noble, right life, I say to you, young men and women, have a will of your own about what you do and choose. Be the masters and lords of the circumstances in which you stand. Put your heel on temptations if they come to you. At any rate, perceive your condition, remember there is the alternative—the one thing *or* the other; and it becomes you to make up your mind, to resolve, to know why you have done so, and to act because and as you have resolved.

There, then, is our first lesson. There are two courses in life. There are *but two.* The two are utterly irreconcileable and discordant. You cannot have them both. It must be one thing or the other. The choice is really made, degradingly and disgracefully by the very act of refraining from choosing. But if you would be men, *choose, determine!* I do not need to contemplate the possibility of anybody here saying, "You have set before me life and death, and I solemnly and deliberately choose death;" but I beseech you, take care that you do not slip into the choice of the worser part before you

know where you are, and that years of careless yielding to circumstances and temptations do not at last rob you of the power to resolve that your life shall ever be otherwise moulded than by external forces.

And now, secondly, let me say to you—not in the shape of a counsel, but in the shape of an earnest, imploring request—"CHOOSE WISDOM."

Let me try to illustrate for you, under the guidance principally of the passage that lies before us, the two courses that are open to every man. There are the two claimants that are standing wooing your affections,—Wisdom on the one side; and this "foolish woman"—the embodiment and personation of Folly—on the other. Look at them first; then at the manner of their respective appeals; and then at the consequences of yielding to the one or the other;—and from all these considerations I think we shall get the strongest motive for pointing the exhortation, "Choose Wisdom,"—"Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding!"

Now, first, as to these two personified claimants standing here before us—Wisdom and Folly. At first sight, on a cursory reading of the early chapters of this book of Proverbs, it may seem as if all that was meant by Wisdom was a shrewd earthly commonsense and worldly prudence; while Folly, on the other hand, may seem to be mere ignorance and want of understanding. But look a little closer, and you will see that the Wisdom spoken of in all these chapters is closely connected not only with clearness of the well-furnished head, but with uprightness of the heart. It is not an intellectual excellence only

(though it *is* that) which the author of the book commends to young men; it is a moral excellence as well. The Wisdom that he speaks about is Wisdom that has rectitude for an essential part of it, the fibre of its very being is righteousness and holiness. Ay, there is no true wisdom which does not rest calmly upon a basis of truthfulness of heart, and is not guarded and nurtured by righteousness and purity of life. Man is one—one and indissoluble. The intellect and the conscience are but two names for diverse parts of the one human being, or rather they are but two names for diverse workings of the one immortal soul. And though it be possible that a man may be enriched with all earthly knowledge, whilst his heart is the dwelling-place of all corruption; and that, on the other hand, a man may be pure and upright in heart, whilst his head is very poorly furnished and his understanding very weak—yet these exceptional cases do not touch the great central truth, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding." Here, then, is the first outline of this fair form that rises before you—a Wisdom satisfying and entire for all the understanding, and not a dry, hard, abstract Wisdom either, but one which is all glowing with light and purity, and is guidance for the will, and cleansing for the conscience, and strength for the practical life: wisdom which is morality and righteousness; morality and righteousness which is the highest wisdom.

Then, there is one step further. The Wisdom that woos you with gentle words, is not only an attribute of the human soul—not only a thing that *we* possess. Re-

member that grand chapter which immediately precedes the one containing the text—where in triumph and organ-swell, as it were, the words roll out, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. When He prepared the heavens, I was there; I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; and I was daily His delight." Look how the form grows grander, solemner, in its severe statue-like beauty, as we look more fixedly on it. We begin with wisdom. We rise to righteousness. We find now that if a man would be wise, it must be with a wisdom that was in God before it is in him; and that if he would be righteous, it must be with a righteousness that is part of the substance of that Divine Being in whom, as in their native home, all human perfections dwell in an untarnished lustre, and reconciling harmony. Ay, brethren, *there* is a truth, that is worth your laying to heart. Young man, if you are longing after knowledge, truth, purity, righteousness—remember that it is no mere *human* attribute that you are desiring—not a thing that you can gain by your own efforts. "Our little systems," which "have their day and cease to be," are but "broken lights" and partial embodiments of Him and His wisdom. Then, if any of you lack wisdom, let him—do what? Think? Study? yes;—but above all, let him "ask of God," in whom all the pure radiance of unrefracted Truth abides for ever. Let his prayer be, "In Thy wisdom make me wise;" and it shall be given him.

So far the impersonation and figure of the text and of the Old Testament carries us, giving us a Wisdom for

man which comes from God, and is righteousness as well as Wisdom. There is a further step to be taken. You remember Who it was that said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life;" and though I know not whether the ancient writer of this book of Proverbs understood what deep things he was saying when he painted Wisdom as *a person*—as a Person brought up with the Father "before the world was"—as a Person who rejoiced from the beginning "in the habitable parts of the earth"—we at least, friends, have a full right to lift the curtain, and let the light of the new flash back upon the old, and say, "Yes, Christ the power of God, and Christ the wisdom of God." There, in that living person, there, in that gentle love, there, in that human form, there, in that eternal Long-suffering, there, in that Brother of our race, who comes to atone, to bless and to inspire us all, there is the highest embodiment of all wisdom, and there is the justification for all that we have been saying about wisdom being nothing divorced from righteousness, and about earthly wisdom being folly unless it be derived from God. It is, then, no ambition for knowledge and truth that I urge upon you, dear friends, as the highest thing. I say to no young man here, "Seek knowledge and get understanding," meaning by that merely, "Work your brain on difficult problems, and brace your mind with deep truth;" I say all that too; but I remind him, if he have any such desires in his heart, that the true Wisdom is no mere Quality, but a living *Person;* and that when she "buildeth her house," and slayeth her sacrifices, and "crieth in the highest places of the city," the invitation comes to us from gentle lips "that did not lift

up nor cause their voice to be heard in the streets," and the voice is the voice of Christ our Brother, our sacrifice and our Lord. It is He that says to you, "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither:" "If any man will, let him come unto *Me*."

These hints for the interpretation of the personified "Wisdom" in our text, involve the explanation of the contrasted "Folly." If wisdom carry with it righteousness, if wisdom and righteousness alike must come from God, if wisdom and righteousness that come from God, find their home in a Person, in Christ our Lord,—then, contrariwise, all which is not of God is the "foolish woman," all which does not inhere in Christ, and appeal to us through and from Him, is that clamorous and persistent voice that leads us all astray, if we listen to it. Oh, my dear young friend, if I can bring you to the full belief of this simple truth—either Christ, or folly; either Christ, or grovelling, sensual sinfulness; either Christ, or a godless, ignoble, selfish life; either Christ, or death at the last,—I shall not have spoken now in vain. Go out into the world, I pray you, and strip everything that appeals to you of its disguises; and you will find it true that, where Christ is not, there—(let it woo ever so sweetly, and sing ever so melodiously)—there is only a siren, that tempts you down beneath the sunny surface of pleasure to the black depths below, where she lives on dead men's bones! There is your choice. On the one side there calls you the God-descended, beautiful, and serene Wisdom, with diadem on her brow, and blessing in her hands, and peace upon her lips,—a Wisdom behind which Christ stands with face fairer yet, lips fuller still of grace, a heart

gentler than the Woman-Wisdom that Solomon knew of, and hands full of better blessings than any that dawned upon him. And on the other side, a loud-voiced, clamorous, painted, deceiving harlot, who calls you to herself to stifle you with her poisonous breath. The world and sense—these are her grossest forms. Young man, take care of them! But there are less offensive forms besetting you all. There is Folly in the garb of Wisdom—Folly that *is* so, because in all its wisdom there is no God. To the one or the other of these two, your life is devoted.

We have next an invitation and appeal that is put into the lips of these two personages respectively. Mark *the manner of these appeals* and *the consequences of listening to them*. The Wisdom of our text appeals to *conscience*. Folly appeals only to the *sense of pleasure*, and desire of gratification. There should be something in young hearts especially which responds more readily to appeals based upon the former and nobler ground than to those which draw their sole force from the latter and lower. It seems to me that it is not pleasure that has the mightiest power upon men. But however that may be, I want to ask whether it is not better for Wisdom to come to you, and say, "Stern discipline I offer you, rebuke when you want it, scourging when you need it, many a sorrow perhaps; but purity in your life and light in your understanding"? —or for Folly to appeal to you with flattering lies, and say, "Come, I will feed thine appetite; I will speak to thy sense; I will give thee sweet things and pleasant dainties; and we shall rejoice, and make life all beautiful and bright with gladness and song, with music and with dancing"? Is that your life—*that* what you are here for?

have you come into this world to be happy merely, or have you come into this world to do God's will—do you think? Is it better that we should tell you, The Gospel will give you pleasures, or that we should tell you, The Gospel will give you purity? Is it better that we should appeal to your conscience, and say, "If you would be right and true, if you would be noble and gentle, if you would be lovely and peaceful, if you would be a true man, a true woman—come to Christ;"—or that we should appeal to your love of happiness, and say, "If you want to pass your days joyfully and in delights, come to Christ"? Oh, brother, Christ indeed says to each of us, "Trust in Me, and thou shalt have gladness;"—but it is not the highest ground on which His call to you rests. And I would infinitely rather tell you all, The walk of a Christian man is a hard fight to the end of his days, than say to you only, Pleasure and delight will be yours.

Of course, *that* is true too. For severe and pure though her beauty is, although the motive that is appealed to is rather conscience than pleasure, yet "her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and her paths are peace." In her hand she hath rich treasures—joy to impart to them that trust her. "All the things thou canst desire" are not to be compared with what she has to bestow—"length of days," honour, a peaceful heart, friends perhaps; at any rate, a life which, be it long or short, be it dark or bright with the world's light, be it rich or poor, be it a failure or a success in the eyes of men, has its life within it, has its joy and peace in heaven with God; and leads on, through sorrow and discipline, through merciful trials and victorious strife, to a perfect immortality,

wherein *he* shall live serene, wise with the wisdom, and righteous with the righteousness of the Holy and All-wise Jehovah, who hath trusted in the Lord, and cast himself upon the mercy of Christ!

Then, finally, let me say to you:—"CHOOSE CHRIST NOW." Dear young friends, you naturally, like the rest of us, put off decision. I suppose there are many of you who think, "It is all true. I wish I were a Christian. I shall make up my mind some day. I shall wait a little." I do not know that you may not live to fulfil your intention. Perhaps you may, perhaps you may not. It is a risk at all events. But this I do know, there is no more dark remembrance to a Christian man than the early days when he put off decision. If even, by God's mercy, you should be led to do the thing that you think you are going to do—become religious when you get a little older—take my word for it, the sorrow that that delay will bring upon you, and the scars of your old sins that the years of godlessness will have left with you, you will carry to your graves. It is an awful risk for a man to run. Every day that you live makes it less likely that you will choose. Every day that you live makes it harder for you to choose aright. Every day that you live puts another shackle on your wrist and another fetter on your foot. Every day that you live takes away some of the power of resolving, and takes away some motive to resolve. Every day adds to the heap of wasted hours that you will carry regretfully with you to your graves, if ever you give the trust of your spirits, the love of your hearts, the obedience of your lives to Christ Jesus at all. Oh, my dear friend, there are men in this

congregation, and there are hundreds of men in Manchester, who would give all that they are worth for that power of choosing a course for their lifetime which you lads and young women, you boys and girls, have—who would give all that they are worth to tear up the scroll of past years that is written with the record of their godlessness and transgression—who would give all that they are worth for one return of the early childish days when the heart was plastic and soft to receive impressions—when the conscience was sensitive to respond to the voice of God, and when long persistence in the attitude of rejection had not so stiffened the will as to make the opening of the long-clenched hand all but impossible. Now, whilst your days are in their bud and blossom—now, whilst your hearts have not learnt all the "deceitfulness of sin"—now, whilst your natures have not been corrupted by much knowledge of evil—now, whilst the world all about you is beautiful with the mysterious light of early days—now, whilst heart, and will, and habit are all fit to be moulded, and moulded aright—now, whilst you have not given pledges to the world by years of unbelief—now, whilst you have not a burden of transgressions, stretching through years to repent of—now, whilst you have life before you, that may be made sacred and beautiful, wise and righteous, full of Christ and a temple to God, brother and friend, little child and young man, I beseech you, listen, not to my voice, but to that Incarnate Wisdom that says to you, "Whosoever is simple, let him turn in hither." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"—and begin this year by CHOOSING—by CHOOSING CHRIST—by CHOOSING CHRIST NOW!

THE SHEPHERD KING OF ISRAEL.

PSALM xxiii.

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

THE King who had been the shepherd-boy, and had been taken from the quiet sheep-cotes to rule over Israel, sings this little psalm of Him who is the true Shepherd and King of men. We do not know at what period of David's life it was written, but it sounds as if it were the work of his later years. There is a fulness of experience about it, and a tone of subdued, quiet confidence which speaks of a heart mellowed by years, and of a faith made sober by many a trial. A young man would not write so calmly, and a life which was just opening would not afford material for such a record of God's guardianship in all changing circumstances.

If, then, we think of the psalm as the work of David's later years, is it not very beautiful to see the old king looking back with such vivid and loving remembrance to his childhood's occupation, and bringing up again to memory in his palace the green valleys, the gentle streams, the dark glens where he had led his flocks in the old days; very beautiful to see him traversing all the stormy years of warfare and rebellion, of crime and sorrow, which lay between, and finding in all God's guardian presence and gracious guidance? The faith which looks back and says, It is all very good, is not less than that which looks forward and says, Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

There is nothing difficult of understanding in the psalm. The train of thought is clear and obvious. The experiences which it details are common, the emotions it expresses simple and familiar. The tears that have been dried, the fears that have been dissipated, by this old song; the love and thankfulness which have found in them their best expression, prove the worth of its simple words. It lives in most of our memories. Let us try to vivify it in our hearts, by pondering it for a little while together now.

The psalm falls into two halves, in both of which the same general thought of God's guardian care is presented, though under different illustrations, and with some variety of detail. The first half sets Him forth as a Shepherd, and us as the sheep of His pasture. The second gives Him as the Host, and us as the guests at His table, and the dwellers in His house.

First, then, consider that picture of THE DIVINE SHEPHERD AND HIS LEADING OF HIS FLOCK.

It occupies the first four verses of the psalm. There is a double progress of thought in it. It rises, from memories of the past, and experiences of the present care of God, to hope for the future. "*The Lord is my Shepherd*"—"*I will fear no evil.*" Then besides this progress from what was and is, to what will be, there is another string, so to speak, on which the gems are threaded. The various methods of God's leading of His flock, or rather, we should say, the various regions into which He leads them, are described in order. These are Rest, Work, Sorrow—and this series is so combined with the order of time already adverted to, as that the past and the present are considered as the regions of rest and of work, while the future is anticipated as having in it the valley of the shadow of death.

First, God leads His sheep into rest. "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters.*" It is the hot noon-tide, and the desert lies baking in the awful glare, and every stone on the hills of Judæa burns the foot that touches it. But in that panting, breathless hour, here is a little green glen, with a quiet brooklet, and a moist lush herbage all along its course, and great stones that fling a black shadow over the dewy grass at their base; and there would the shepherd lead his flock, while the "sunbeams, like swords," are piercing everything beyond that hidden covert. Sweet silence broods there. The sheep feed and drink, and couch in cool lairs till he calls them forth again. So God leads His children.

The psalm puts the rest and refreshment *first*, as being the most marked characteristic of God's dealings. After

all, it is so. The years are years of unbroken continuity of outward blessings. The reign of afflictions is ordinarily measured by days. Weeping endures for a night. It is a rainy climate where half the days have rain in them; and that is an unusually troubled life of which it can with any truth be affirmed that there has been as much darkness as sunshine in it.

But it is not mainly of outward blessings that the psalmist is thinking. They are precious chiefly as emblems of the better spiritual gifts; and it is not an accommodation of his words, but is the appreciation of their truest spirit, when we look upon them, as the instinct of devout hearts has ever done, as expressing both God's gift of temporal mercies, and His gift of spiritual good, of which higher gift all the lower are meant to be significant and symbolic. Thus regarded, the image describes the sweet rest of the soul in communion with God, in whom alone the hungry heart finds food that satisfies, and from whom alone the thirsty soul drinks draughts deep and limpid enough.

This rest and refreshment has for its consequence the restoration of the soul, which includes in it both the invigoration of the natural life by the outward sort of these blessings, and the quickening and restoration of the spiritual life by the inward feeding upon God and repose in Him.

The soul thus restored is then led on another stage; "*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake*,"—that is to say, God guides us into work.

The quiet mercies of the preceding verse are not in themselves the end of our Shepherd's guidance; they

are means to an end, and that is—work. Life is not a fold for the sheep to lie down in, but a road for them to walk on. All our blessings of every sort are indeed given us for our delight. They will never fit us for the duties for which they are intended to prepare us, unless they first be thoroughly enjoyed. The highest good they yield is only reached through the lower one. But, then, when joy fills the heart, and life is bounding in the veins, we have to learn that these are granted, not for pleasure only, but for pleasure in order to power. We get them, not to let them pass away like waste steam puffed into empty air, but that we may use them to drive the wheels of life. The waters of happiness are not for a luxurious bath where a man may lie, till, like flax steeped too long, the very fibre be rotted out of him; a quick plunge will brace him, and he will come out refreshed for work. Rest is to fit for work, work is to sweeten rest.

All this is emphatically true of the spiritual life. Its seasons of communion, its hours on the mount, are to prepare for the sore sad work in the plain; and he is not the wisest disciple who tries to make the Mount of Transfiguration the abiding place for himself and his Lord.

It is not well that our chief object should be to enjoy the consolations of religion; it is better to seek first to do the duties enjoined by religion. Our first question should be, not, How may I enjoy God? but, How may I glorify Him? "A single eye to His glory" means, that even our comfort and joy in religious exercises shall be subordinated, and (if need were) postponed, to the doing of His will. While, on the one hand, there is no more

certain means of enjoying Him than that of humbly seeking to walk in the ways of His commandments, on the other hand, there is nothing more evanescent in its nature than a mere emotion, even though it be that of joy in God, unless it be turned into a spring of action for God. Such emotions, like photographs, vanish from the heart unless they be fixed. Work for God is the way to fix them. Joy in God is the strength of work for God, but work for God is the perpetuation of joy in God.

Here is the figurative expression of the great evangelical principle, that works of righteousness must follow, not precede, the restoration of the soul. We are justified not by works, but for works, or, as the apostle puts it in a passage which sounds like an echo of this psalm, we are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained *that we should walk in them*." The basis of obedience is the sense of salvation. We work not *for* the assurance of acceptance and forgiveness, but *from* it. First the restored soul, then the paths of righteousness for *His* name's sake who has restored me, and restored me that I may be like Him.

But there is yet another region through which the varied experience of the Christian carries him, besides those of rest and of work. God leads His people through sorrow. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.*"

The "valley of the shadow of death" does not only mean the dark approach to the dark dissolution of soul and body, but any and every gloomy valley of weeping through which we have to pass. Such sunless gorges we have all to traverse at some time or other. It is striking

that the psalmist puts the sorrow, which is as certainly characteristic of our lot as the rest or the work, into the future. Looking back he sees none. Memory has softened down all the past into one uniform tone, as the mellowing distance wraps in one solemn purple the mountains which, when close to them, have many a barren rock and gloomy rift. All behind is good. And, building on this hope, he looks forward with calmness, and feels that no evil shall befall.

But it is never given to human heart to meditate of the future without some foreboding. And when "Hope enchanted smiles," with the light of the future in her blue eyes, there is ever something awful in their depths, as if they saw some dark visions behind the beauty. Some evils may come; some will probably come; one at least is sure to come. However bright may be the path, somewhere on it, perhaps just round that turning, sits the "shadow feared of man." So there is never pure hope in any heart that wisely considers the future. But to the Christian heart there may be this—the conviction that sorrow, when it comes, will not be evil, because God will be with us; and the conviction that the hand which guides us into the dark valley, will guide us through it and up out of it. Yes, strange as it may sound, the presence of Him who sends the sorrow is the best help to bear it. The assurance that the hand which strikes is the hand which binds up, makes the stroke a blessing, sucks the poison out of the wound of sorrow, and turns the rod which smites into the staff to lean on.

The second portion of this psalm gives us substantially the same thoughts under a different image. Consider

GOD AS THE HOST, AND US AS THE GUESTS AT HIS TABLE AND THE DWELLERS IN HIS HOUSE.

In this illustration, which includes the remaining verses, we have, as before, the food and rest, the journey and the suffering. We have also, as before, memory and present experience issuing in hope. But it is all intensified. The necessity and the mercy are alike presented in brighter colours; the want is greater, the supply greater, the hope for the future on earth brighter; and, above all, while the former set of images stopped at the side of the grave, and simply refused to fear, here the vision goes on beyond the earthly end; and as the hope comes brightly out, that all the weary wanderings will end in the peace of the Father's house, the absence of fear is changed into the presence of triumphant confidence, and the resignation which, at the most, simply bore to look unfaltering into the depth of the narrow house, becomes the faith which plainly sees the open gate of the everlasting home.

God supplies our wants in the very midst of strife. "*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over.*" Before, it was food and rest first, work afterwards. Now it is more than work—it is conflict. And the mercy is more strikingly portrayed, as being granted not only *before toil*, but *in warfare.* Life is a sore fight; but to the Christian man, in spite of all the tumult, life is a festal banquet. There stand the enemies, ringing him round with cruel eyes, waiting to be let slip upon him like eager dogs round the poor beast of the chase. But for all that, here is spread a table in the wilderness, made

ready by invisible hands; and the grim-eyed foe is held back in the leash till the servant of God has fed and been strengthened. This is our condition—always the foe, always the table.

What sort of a meal should that be? The soldiers who eat and drink, and are drunken in the presence of the enemy, like the Saxons before Hastings, what will become of them? Drink the cup of gladness, as men do when their foe is at their side, looking askance over the rim, and with one hand on the sword, ready, aye, ready, against treachery and surprise. But the presence of the danger should make the feast more enjoyable too, by the moderation it enforces, and by the contrast it affords—as to sailors on shore, or soldiers in a truce. Joy may grow on the very face of danger, as a slender rose-bush flings its bright sprays and fragrant blossoms over the lip of a cataract; and that not the wild mirth of men in a pestilence, with their "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," but the simple-hearted gladness of those who have preserved the invaluable childhood gift of living in the present moment, because they know that to-morrow will bring God, whatever it brings, and not take away His care and love, whatever it takes away.

This, then, is the form under which the experience of the past is presented in the second portion,—joy in conflict, rest and food even in the strife. Upon that there is built a hope which transcends that in the previous portion of the psalm. As to this life, "*Goodness and mercy shall follow us.*" This is more than, *I will fear no evil.* That said, sorrow is not evil if God be with us. This says, sorrow is mercy. The one is hope looking

mainly at outward circumstances, the other is hope learning the spirit and meaning of them all. These two angels of God—Goodness and Mercy—shall follow and encamp around the pilgrim. The enemies whom God held back while he feasted, may pursue, but will not overtake him. They will be distanced sooner or later; but the white wings of these messengers of the covenant shall never be far away from the journeying child, and the air shall often be filled with the music of their comings, and their celestial weapons shall glance around him in all the fight, and their soft arms shall bear him up over all the rough ways, and up higher at last to the throne.

So much for the earthly future. But higher than all that rises the confidence of the closing words, "*I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*" This should be at once the crown of all our hopes for the future, and the one great lesson taught us by all the vicissitudes of life. The sorrows and the joys, the journeying and the rest, the temporary repose and the frequent struggles, all these should make us *sure* that there is an end which will interpret them all, to which they all point, for which they may all prepare. We get the table in the wilderness here. It is as when the son of some great king comes back from foreign soil to his father's dominions, and is welcomed at every stage in his journey to the capital with pomp of festival, and messengers from the throne, until he enters at last his palace home, where the travel-stained robe is laid aside, and he sits down with his father at his table. God provides for us here in the presence of our enemies; it is wilderness food we get,

manna from heaven, and water from the rock. We eat in haste, staff in hand, and standing round the meal. But yonder we sit down with the Shepherd, the Master of the house, at His table in His kingdom. We put off the pilgrim-dress, and put on the royal robe; we lay aside the sword, and clasp the palm. Far off, and lost to sight, are all the enemies. We fear no change. We go no more out.

The sheep are led by many a way, sometimes through sweet meadows, sometimes limping along sharp-flinted dusty highways, sometimes high up over rough rocky mountain-passes, sometimes down through deep gorges, with no sunshine in their gloom; but they are ever being led to one place, and when the hot day is over they are gathered into one fold, and the sinking sun sees them safe, where no wolf can come, nor any robber climb up any more, but all shall rest for ever under the Shepherd's eye.

Brethren, can you take this psalm for yours? Have you returned unto Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls? Oh! let Him, the Shepherd of Israel, and the Lamb of God, one of the fold and yet the guide and defender of it, human and divine, bear you away from the dreary wilderness whither He has come seeking you. He will carry you rejoicing to the fold, if only you will trust yourselves to His gentle arm. He will restore your soul. He will lead you and keep you from all dangers, guard you from every sin, strengthen you when you come to die, and bring you to the fair plains beyond that narrow gorge of frowning rock.

Then this sweet psalm shall receive its highest fulfil-

ment, for then "they shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes."

THE FOOD OF THE WORLD.

ST. MATTHEW xiv. 19, 20.

He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.

THE miracles of Scripture are not merely wonders, but signs. It is one of their most striking characteristics that they are not, like the pretended portents of false faiths, mere mighty deeds standing in no sort of intellectual relation to the message of which they claim to be the attestation, but that they have themselves a doctrinal significance. Our Lord's miracles have been called "the great bell before the sermon," but they are more than that. They are themselves no unimportant part of the sermon. In fact, it would not be difficult to construct from them a revelation of His nature, person and work, scarcely less full and explicit than that contained in His words, or even than that more systematic and developed one which we receive in the writings of His apostles.

This miracle, for instance, of the feeding of the five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fishes is

one of the few which the Apostle John relates in his gospel, and his reason for selecting it seems to be the commentary with which our Lord followed it, and which John alone has preserved. That commentary is all the wonderful discourse about Christ as the bread of life, and eating His flesh as our means of receiving His life into ourselves. We are warranted then in regarding this miracle as a symbolic revelation of Christ as supplying all the wants of this hungry world.

If so, we may perhaps venture to take one more step, and regard the manner in which He dispenses His gifts as also significant. His agents are His disciples, or, as would appear probable from the twelve baskets full of fragments, the twelve apostles, the nucleus and representatives of His Church.

Thus we come to the point from which we wish to regard this narrative now. There are three stages in the words of our text—the distribution, the meal, and the gathering up of the abundance that was left. These three stages may guide us to some thoughts regarding the work to which Christ calls His Church, the success which attends it, and the results to the distributors themselves.

First, CHRIST FEEDS THE FAMISHING WORLD BY MEANS OF HIS CHURCH. "He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the *disciples* to the multitude." One very striking feature in all our Lord's miracles is economy of power. The miraculous element being admitted for some good and sufficient reason, it is kept down to the lowest possible point. Precisely so much of it as is needed is permitted, and not one hair's breadth more. It does

not begin to make its appearance at any point in the process where ordinary human agency can be used. It does not produce a result beyond the actual necessity. It does not last one instant longer than is required. It inosculates closely with the natural order of things.

Take an illustration from the beginning of miracles where Jesus manifested forth His glory, the marriage at Cana of Galilee—that great miracle in which our Lord hallowed the ties of human affection, and consecrated the joy of united hearts. The necessity is felt before He supplies it. The servants fill the waterpots. The water is used as the material on which the miraculous power operates. Only so much as is drawn for present use becomes wine. The servants are used as the agents for the distribution, and all is done so unostentatiously, though it be the manifesting of His glory, that no man knows but they.

Take another illustration from the other great contrasted miracle at the grave of Lazarus, where our Lord hallowed the breaking of earthly bonds by death, and sanctified the sorrows of parted love. He does not work His wonder from the other side Jordan, but comes. He does not anticipate the death He will conquer, nor prevent the grief which He shares. He goes to the side of the grave—true human tears wet upon His cheek. They have to roll away the stone. Then, there is flung into the darkness of the tomb the mighty word, "Lazarus! come forth." The inconceivable miraculous act is done, and life stirs in the sheeted dead. But there, the miraculous ceases. The man with his restored life has to come himself out of the grave, and human

hands have tremblingly to lift the napkin from the veiled face (how they must have thrilled as they did it, wondering what nameless horror they might see in the eyes that had looked on the inner chamber of death), and human help has to unfold the grave-clothes from the tightly swathed and stumbling limbs, "Loose him, and let him go."

This marked characteristic of all our Lord's miracles is full of instruction, which it would lead us too far from our present purpose to indicate at any length. But we may just observe in passing, that it brings these into striking parallel with the divine creative act, where there is ever the same precise adaptation of power employed to result contemplated, the same background of veiled omnipotence, the same emergence of proportioned, adequate, but not superfluous force, that, in fact, economy of power may be said to be the very signature and broad arrow of divinity stamped on all His works. Again, it presents a broad contrast to the wild reckless miracle-mongering of false faiths, and is at once a test of the genuineness of all "lying signs and wonders," and an indication of the self-restraint of the worker, and of the fine sanity and truthfulness of the narrators of these Gospel miracles. And yet, again, it is one phase of the disciplinary character of the whole revelation of God in Christ—not obtrusive, though obvious, capable of being overlooked if men will. "There was the hiding of His power." "If any man wills to be ignorant, let him be ignorant."

But coming more immediately to the narrative before us, we find this same characteristic in full prominence in

it—The people are allowed to hunger. The disciples are permitted to feel themselves at their wits' end. They are bid to bring their poor resources to Christ. The lad who had come with his little store, perhaps a fisherman's boy from some of the lake villages who hoped to sell his loaves and fishes in the crowd, supplies the material on which Christ wills to exercise His miraculous power. The disciples' agency is pressed into the service. Each man separately receives his portion, and when all are supplied, the fragments are carefully preserved for the use of those who had been fed by miracle, and of Him who had fed them!

Besides the general lessons already referred to, as naturally arising from this feature of the miracle, there is that one which belongs to it especially, namely, that *Christ feeds the famishing world by means of His Church.*

Precisely as in the miracles in general, so in the work of Christ as a whole, the field of supernatural intervention is rigidly confined, and fits in with the established order of things. The Incarnation and Sacrifice of our Lord are the purely supernatural work of the Divine Power and Mercy. He comes, enters into our human conditions, assumes our humanity, dies the death for us all. "I have trodden the wine-press alone." There is no question of any human agency co-operating there, any more than there is in the word "Lazarus, come forth," or in the multiplication of the loaves. There, by Christ alone, is brought to us and is finished for us an eternal redemption, with which the whole race of man have nothing to do but to receive it, to eat and be filled. But this having been done by the solitary work of Jesus

Christ, this new power having been introduced into the world, human agency is henceforth called into operation to diffuse it, just as the servants at Cana had to draw the wine which He had made, just as the disciples at the sea of Tiberias have to give to the multitude the bread which was blessed and broken by His hands.

The supernaturally given Bread of Life is to be carried over the world in accordance with the ordinary laws by which all other truth is diffused, and all other gifts that belong to one man are held by him in stewardship for all his fellows. True, there is ever in and with that word of life a Divine Spirit, which is the real cause of its progress, which guards it from destruction though all men were faithless, and keeps it alive though all Israel bowed the knee to Baal. But, however easy it may be for us to confuse ourselves with metaphysical puzzles about the relation between the natural and the supernatural elements,—the human agency and the Divine energizer—in the successful discharge of the Church's work, practically the matter is very plain.

The truth that it behoves us all to lay to heart is just this—that Christian people are Christ's instruments for effecting the realization of the purposes of His death. Not without them shall He see of the travail of His soul. Not without them shall the preaching be fully known. Not without the people willing in the day of His power, and clothed in priestly beauty, shall the Priest King set His feet upon His enemies. Not without the armies of heaven following Him, shall the "Word of God" ride forth to victory. Neither the Divine decree, nor the expansive power of the Truth, nor the crowned ex-

pectancy of the waiting Lord, nor the mighty working of the Comforter, are the complete means for the accomplishment of the Divine promise, that all nations shall be blessed in Him. Could all these be conceived of as existing without the service and energies of God's Church proclaiming the name of Christ, they were not enough. He has willed that to us, less than the least of all saints, should this grace be given, that we should make known the unsearchable riches of Christ. God reveals His truth, that men who believe it may impart it. God gives the word, that, caught up by those who receive it into an honest and good heart, it may be poured forth, in mighty chorus from the lips of the "great company of them that publish it." "He gave the loaves to the disciples, and the *disciples* to the multitude."

Christian men! learn your high vocation, and your solemn responsibilities. What! came the word of God out from you, or came it *unto* you only? For what did you receive it? For the same reason for which you have received everything else which you possess—that you might share it with your brethren. How did you receive it? A gift, unmerited, the result of a miracle of Divine mercy, that you might feel bound to give as ye have received, and spread the free Divine gift by cheerful human work of distribution. From whom did you receive it? From Christ, who in the very act of giving binds you to live for Him and not for yourselves, and to mould your lives after the pattern of His. What a multitude of motives converge on the solemn duty of work for Christ, if we read in the light of this deeper meaning the simple words of our text, "He gave the

loaves to the disciples!" What manner of servant is he who can bear to have no part in the blessed work that follows—"and the disciples to the multitude"?

It is further noticeable *how these apostles were prepared for the work* which they had to do. The first lesson which they had to learn was the almost ludicrous disproportion between the resources at their command and the necessities of the crowd. "How many loaves have ye? go and see."

And this is the first lesson that we have to learn in all our work for Christ and for our brethren, that in ourselves we have nothing fit for the task before us. Think of what that task is as measured by the necessities and sorrows of men. Think of all the sighs that go up at every moment from burdened hearts, of the tears that run down so many blanched and anxious cheeks. Think of "*all* the misery that is done under the sun!" If it could be made visible, what a dark pall would swathe the world, an atmosphere of sorrow rolling ever with it through space. The sight is too sad to be seen by any but by Him who cures it all, and it wrung from His heart the sigh with which ere He cured one poor sufferer—a drop in the ocean—He looked up to heaven, as in mute appeal against all these heaped miseries of suffering man.

And we, what can we do in ourselves? On what comparison of our resources do we not feel utterly inadequate to the work? If we think of the proportion in numbers, we have to say, like the narrator of the wars in Israel, "The children of Israel pitched before them like two little flocks of kids, but the Syrians filled the country." If we think of the strength that we our-

selves possess and look at our own tremulous faith, at our own feeble love, at the uncertain hold which we ourselves have on the Gospel we profess, at the mists and darkness which cover so much of God's revelation from our own understandings, at the sins and faults of our own lives, must we not cry out, Send whom Thou wilt send, O Lord, but take not me, so sinful, so little influenced by Thy grace, to be the messenger of Thy grace. "Who is sufficient for these things?"

And such contemplations, when they drive home to our hearts the wholesome lesson of our own weakness, are the beginning, and the only possible beginning, of Divine strength. The only temper in which we can serve God and bless man is that of lowliest self-abasement. God works with bruised reeds, and out of them makes polished shafts, pillars in His house. Only when we are low on our faces before God, crying out, "Unclean, unclean," does the purifying coal touch our lips, and the prophet strength flow into our souls.

Be humble and self-distrustful, and then learn the further lesson of this narrative, and *carry your poor inadequate resources to Christ.* "Bring them hither to Me." In His hands they become sufficient. He multiplies them. He gives wisdom, strength, all that fits for the task to which He calls us. Bring your little faith to Him; He will increase it. Bring your feeble love to Him, and ask Him to kindle it from the pure flame of His own, and He will make your heart burn within you. Bring your partial understanding of His will and way to Him, and He will be to you wisdom. Bring all the poverty of your natures, all the insufficiency of your

religious character, all the inadequacy of your poor work to your Lord. Feel it all. Let the conviction of your nothingness sink into your soul. Then wait before Him in simple faith, in lowly obedience, and power will come to you equal to your desire and to your duties, and He will put His Spirit upon you, and will anoint you to proclaim liberty to the captives and to give bread to all the hungry. "Who is sufficient for these things" must ever precede, and will ever be followed by, "our sufficiency is of God."

Mark again. The disciples seem to have partaken of the bread themselves before they parted it among the multitudes. That is the true preparation of men for the work of feeding the hungry. The Church which feeds the world is able to do so, only because, and in proportion as, it has found Christ its own sustenance and life. It is only they who can say "we have tasted and felt and handled of the word of life," who can declare it to others. Personal participation in the bread of life makes any man able to offer it to some fainting spirit. Nothing else makes him able. Ability involves responsibility. "Power to its last particle is duty." You, dear friends, who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious" have thereby come under weighty obligations. Your own personal experience of that precious bread has fitted you to do something in offering it to others. The manner in which you do so must be determined by your character and circumstances. Every one has his proper walk; but something you can do. To some lips you can commend the food for all the world. Somewhere your word is a power. See tha you do what you can do. Remember

that Christ feeds the world by His Church, and that every man who has himself eaten of the bread of life is thereby consecrated to carry it to those who yet are perishing in the far-off hunger-ridden land, and trying to fill their bellies with the husks that the swine eat.

Secondly, THE BREAD IS ENOUGH FOR ALL THE WORLD. "They did all eat and were filled." One can fancy how doubtingly and grudgingly the apostles doled out the supplies at first, and how the portion of each was increased, as group after group was provided, and no diminution appeared in Christ's full hands, until, at last, all the five thousand, of all ages, of both sexes, of every sort were fed, and the fragments lying uncared for proved how sufficient had been the share of each.

May we not see in that scene a picture of the full supply for all the wants of the whole world which there is in that bread of life which came down from heaven? The Gospel proclaims a full feast, which is enough for all mankind, which is intended for all mankind, which shall one day satisfy all mankind.

This universal adaptation of the message of the Gospel to the whole world arises from the obvious fact that it addresses itself to universal wants, to the great rudimentary, universally diffused characteristics of human nature, and that it provides for all these, in the grand simplicity of its good tidings, the one sufficing answering word. It entangles itself with no local or historical peculiarities of the time and place of its earthly origin, which can hinder it in its universal diffusion. It commits itself to no transient human opinions. It addresses itself to no sectional characteristics of classes of men. It brushes aside

all the surface distinctions which separate us from one another, and goes right down to the depths of the central identities in which we are all alike. "We have all of us one human heart." However we may differ from one another, in training, in habits, in cast of thought, in idiosyncrasies of character, in circumstances, in age, all these are but the upper strata which vary locally. Beneath all these there lie everywhere the solid foundations of the primeval rocks, and beneath these, again, the glowing central mass, the flaming heart of the world. Christianity sends its shaft right down through all these upper and local beds, till it reaches the deepest depths which are the same in every man—the obstinate wilfulness of a nature averse from God, and the yet deeper-lying longings of a soul that flames with the consciousness of God, and yearns for rest and peace. To the sense of sin, to the sense of sorrow, to the conscience never wholly stifled, to the desires after good never utterly eradicated and never slaked by aught besides itself does this mighty word come. Not to this or that sort of man, not to men in this or that phase of progress, age of the world, stage of civilization, does it address itself, but to the common humanity which belongs to all, to the wants and sorrows and inward consciousness which belong to man as man, be he philosopher or fool, king or slave, Eastern or Western, "pagan suckled in a creed outworn," or Englishman with the new lights and material science of this nineteenth century.

Hence its universal adaption to mankind. It alone of all so-called faiths overleaps all geographical limits and lives in all centuries. It alone wins its trophies and

bestows its gifts on all sorts and conditions of men. Other plants which the "Heavenly Father hath not planted" have their zones of vegetation and die outside certain degrees of latitude, but the seed of the Kingdom is like corn, an exotic nowhere, for wherever man lives it will grow, and yet an exotic everywhere, for it came down from heaven. Other food requires an educated palate for its appreciation, but any hungry man in any land will relish bread. For every soul on earth this living dying love of the Lord Jesus Christ addresses itself to and satisfies his deepest wants. It is the bread which gives life to the world.

And one of the constituents of that company by the Galilean lake was children. It is one great glory of Christianity that its merciful mysteries can find their way to the hearts of the little children. Its mysteries we say—for the Gospel has its mysteries no less than these old systems of heathenism which fenced round their deepest truths with solemn barriers, only to be passed by the initiated. But the difference lies here—that its mysteries are taught at first to the neophytes, and that the sum of them lies in the words which we learned at our mother's knees so long ago that we have forgotten that they were ever new to us. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life." The little child who has learned his earliest lessons of what Father and Son, loving and giving, trust and life mean, by the sweet experiences of his own father's home and his mother's love, can grasp these blessed words. They carry the deepest mysteries which will still gleam before us un-

fathomed in all their profundity, unappropriated in all their blessedness, when millenniums have passed since we stood in the inner shrine of heaven. Wonderful the word which blesses the child, which transcends the angel before the throne!

This is the bread for the world—meant for it, and one day to be partaken of by it. For these ordered fifties at their Christ-provided meal are for us a prophecy of the day that shall surely dawn, when all the hunger of wandering prodigals is over, and the deceived heart of the idol-worshipper no longer drawing him aside to feed on ashes, they shall come from the East and from the West, and from the North and from the South, and sit at the feast which the Lord hath prepared for all nations, and when all the earth shall be satisfied with the goodness of His house, even of His holy temple.

Finally, THE BREAD WHICH IS GIVEN TO THE FAMISHING IS MULTIPLIED FOR THE FUTURE OF THE DISTRIBUTORS.

"They took of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full."

More was gathered than they had possessed at first. They preserved over, for their own sustenance and refreshment for days to come, a far larger store than the five loaves and two small fishes with which they had begun. That fact contains a principle which is true about almost all except material possessions, which is often in God's providence made true about them, and which is emphatically true about spiritual blessings, about our religious emotions, our Christian beliefs, the joys and powers which Christ comes to give.

For all these, the condition of increase is diffusion. To impart to others is to gain for oneself. Every honest effort to bring some other human heart into conscious possession of Christ's love deepens my own sense of its preciousness. Every attempt to lead some other understanding to the perception of the truth, as it is in Jesus, helps me to understand it better myself. If you would learn, teach. That will clear your mind, will open hidden harmonies, will reveal unsuspected deficiencies and contradictions in your own conceptions, will help you to feel more the truths that come from your lips. It will perhaps shame your cold appreciation of them, when you see how others grasp at them from your teaching, or give you more confidence in the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation when you behold it, even as ministered through you, mighty to pull down strongholds. At the lowest, it will keep your own mind in healthy contact with what you are but too apt to forget. If you would learn to love Christ more, try to lead some one else to love Him. You will catch new gleams of His gracious heart in the very act of commending it to others. If you would have your own spiritual life strengthened and deepened, remember that not by solitary meditation or raptures of silent communion alone can that be accomplished, but by these and by honest manful work for God in the world. The Mount of Transfiguration must be left, for all there were there, Moses and Elias, and the cloud of the Divine Glory, and the words of approval from heaven, because there was a demoniac boy and his weeping, despairing father needing Christ down below. Work for God if you would live with God. Give the

bread to the hungry, if you would have it for the food of your own souls.

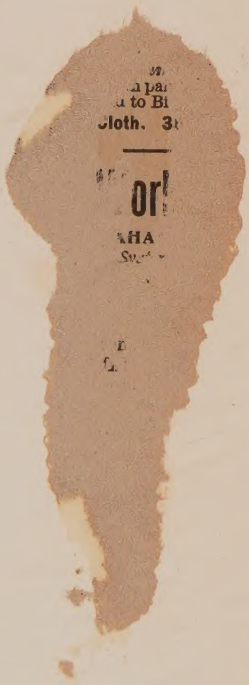
The refusal to engage in such service is one fruitful cause of the low state of spiritual health in which so many Christians pass their days. They seem to think that they get the bread from heaven only for their own use, and that they have done all that they have to do with it, when they eat it themselves. And so come all manner of spiritual diseases. A selfish, that is an inactive religion, is always more or less a morbid religion. For health you need exercise. "In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread." That expresses not only the law that work is needed to get it, but that toil must give the appetite, and work must fit the frame to digest it. There is such a thing as morbid Christianity brought on by want of healthy exercise.

"There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to poverty." Good husbandry does not grind up all the year's wheat for loaves for one's own eating, but keeps some of it for seed to be scattered in the furrows. And if Christian men will deal with the great love of God, the great work of Christ, the great message of the Gospel, as if it were bestowed on them for their own sakes only, they will have only themselves to blame if holy desires die out in their hearts, and the consciousness of Christ's love becomes faint, and all the blessed words of truth come to sound far off and mythical in their ears. The standing water gets green scum on it. The close shut barn breeds weevils and smut. Let the water run. Fling the seed broad-cast. Thou shalt find it after

many days, bread for thy own soul—even as these ministering apostles were enriched whilst they gave, and the full-handed liberality with which they carried Christ's gifts among the crowd had something to do in providing the large residue which filled their stores for days to come!

Thus, then, this scene on the sweet springing grass down by the side of blue Tiberias is an emblem of the whole work of the Church in this starving world. The multitudes famish. Tell Christ of their wants. Count your own small resources till you have completely learned your poverty, then take them to Jesus. He will accept them, and in His hands they will become mighty, being transfigured from human thoughts and forces into divine words, into spiritual powers. On that bread which He gives, do you yourselves live. Then carry it boldly to all the hungry. Rank after rank will eat. All races, all ages, from grey hairs to babbling childhood, will find there the food of their souls. As you part the blessing, it will grow beneath His eye; and the longer you give, the fuller handed you will become. Nor shall the bread fail, nor the word become weak, till all the world has tasted of its sweetness, and been refreshed by its potent life.

This is the miracle for the workers. There is another wondrous meal recorded in Scripture, which is the prophecy for the workers when they rest. The little ship has been tossing all the night on the waters of that Galilean lake. Fruitless has been the fishing. The morning breaks cold and grey, and lo! there stands on the shore one who first blesses their work, and then bids

them to His table. There, mysteriously kindled, burns the fire with the welcome meal already laid upon it. They add to it the contribution of their night of toil, and then, hushed and blessed in His still company, they sup with Him, and He with them. So when the weary work is over for the Church on earth, we shall be aware of His merciful presence on the shore, and, coming at the last safe to land, we shall "rest from our labours," in that we see the "fire of coals, and fish laid thereon and bread;" and our "works shall follow us" in that we are "bidden to bring of the fish that we have caught." There, putting off the wet fisher's coat, and leaving behind the tossing of the unquiet sea, and the toil of the weary fishing, we shall sit down with Him at that meal spread by His own hands, who blesseth the works of His servants here below, and giveth to them all full fruition of immortal food at His table at the last.

THE END